

ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned with the anti-imperialist politics of the CPGB in the period 1920-1951. It looks at the policies and practical measures taken by the CPGB to promote colonial liberation both within the British Empire and (as a cause) at home in Britain. In particular, it examines the Party's activities in India and on behalf of the Indian nationalist, socialist, and trade union movements. It also considers the very different case of British colonies in sub-Saharan Africa, where nationalist movements were only in their infancy in the period under consideration. Thus the forms of political activity considered in this work range from the purely agitational and propagandistic to the directly interventionary. The work also considers the theoretic context of Communist activity in regard to the colonies. But since this is well-trodden ground the thesis is more concerned to establish what the CPGB attempted to achieve and how it set about achieving it. In trying to establish the scope and nature of the CPGB's anti-colonial activities, the thesis is necessarily concerned, to some extent, with the sympathetic periphery of individuals and organisations that came into the Party's orbit. This research is the first to make extensive use of the archive of the CPGB (much of which has only recently become available) in relation to this important, but largely neglected, arena of Communist politics in the twentieth century.

THE ANTI-COLONIAL POLITICS AND POLICIES OF THE COMMUNIST PARTY
OF GREAT BRITAIN: 1920-51

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AEU	Amalgamated Engineering Union
AITUC	All Indian Trades Union Congress
ANC	African National Congress
ARPS	Aborigines' Rights Protection Society
AWSA	African Workers' and Students' Association
BITU	Bustamante Industrial Trade Union
BSS	British Somali Society
CDA	Colonial Defence Association
CDRN	Comite de la defense de la race negre
CLC	Caribbean Labour Congress
CPSU	Communist Party of the Soviet Union
CPUSA	Communist Party of America
CSP	Congress Socialist Party
CSU	Coloured Seamen's Union
CWIA	Committee for West Indian Affairs
ECCI	Executive Committee of the Comintern
EOO	Egbe Omo Oduduwa
Fedind	Federation of Indian Students Association
GLCR	German League for Civil Rights
GKU	Girni Kamgar Union
IAFA(E)	International African Friends of Abyssinia (Ethiopia)
IASB	International African Services Bureau
ICFTU	International Federation of Free Trade Unions
ICPP	International Committee for Political Prisoners
ICU	Industrial and Commercial Workers Union (South Africa)
ILD	International Labour Defence
ILO	International Labour Organisation

IFTU	International Federation of Trade Unions
ILP	Independent Labour Party
INC	Indian National Congress
IRD	Information Research Department
ISA	Indian Seamen's Association
ISC	International Seamen's Clubs
ISHW	International of Seamen and Harbour Workers' Unions
ITUCNW	International Trade Union Congress of Negro Workers
KCA	Kikuyu Central Association
KMT	Kuomintang (Chinese Nationalists)
LACO	League Against Colonial Oppression
LAI	League Against Imperialism
LCP	League of Coloured Peoples
LPACIQ	Labour Party Advisory Committee on International Questions
LRD	Labour Research Department
ISA	Indian Seamen's Association
LUSS	London University Socialist Society
LSE	London School of Economics
LSI	Labour and Socialist International
MOPR	International Red Aid
MCP	Malayan Communist Party
MPDL(C)	Meerut Prisoners Defence League (Committee)
NAACP	National Association for the Advancement of Coloured Peoples
NAFTA	National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades Association
NFL	Nigerian Federation of Labour
NCBWA	Nigerian Congress of British West Africa
NIS	New International Society
NLC	Nigerian Labour Congress

NLNC	National Council of Nigeria and the Camaroons
NMM	National Minority Movement
NSU	National Seamen's Union
NUWM	National Unemployed Workers' Movement
NWA	Negro Welfare Association
OSU	Oriental Seamens' Union
OWTU	Oilfield Workers' Trade Union
PAC	Pan-African Congress
PAF	Pan-African Federation
PNM	Peoples' National Movement (Trinidad)
PNP	Peoples' National Party of Jamaica
RILU	Red International of Labour Unions (Profintern)
RPC	Revolutionary Policy Committee
SDP	Social Democratic Federation
SL	Socialist League
SYL	Somali Youth League
TLP	Trinidad Labour Party
UAC	United Africa Company
UACWU	United Africa Company Workers' Union
UCCCO	United Committee of Coloured and Colonial Organisations
UCW	United Clothing Workers' Union
WANS	West African National Secretariat
WASU	West African Students' Union
WFTU	World Federation of Trade Unions
WIR	Workers' International Relief
WPP	Workers' and Peasants' Parties
WWLI	Workers' Welfare League of India
YCL	Young Communist League

PREFACE

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 was the first avowedly anti-imperialist revolution. The Communist International, subsequently launched by Lenin in Moscow in 1919, took as its rationale his *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1916) - a work which made the future of socialism dependent on the contradictions of the imperialist epoch.

Theoretically, the Communist movement placed anti-colonialism at the centre of working-class politics in Europe and in doing so, assisted the process by which socialist culture permeated all the major anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements.

Goran Therborn observes that: 'This holds for the Indian Congress Party - the pioneering nationalist organisation of the whole colonial zone from Northwest Africa to the archipelagoes of the South Sea - the ANC, the Indonesian nationalist movement, Pan-Africanism and Pan-Arabism. Socialist anti-colonialism and anti-imperialism were even more central to the major Asian Communist movements - the ultimately defeated ones such as the Filipino, Malayan, and the Indonesian, as well as the victorious ones: the Chinese, the North Korean, the Indochinese . . . In addition a culture of socialist rhetoric has been cultivated by a large number of post-colonial non-Communist regimes, from Sukarno's Indonesia, the early days of independent Singapore, Burmese socialism, and that of the Nehru dynasty in India, to the Islamic, Arab and African socialisms further west . . . In the colonising world only Communists and left-wing socialists stood for universalist, non-racist conceptions of equality, and offered solidarity to the nationalist movements of the colonial zone.'¹

Over the years Communist states offered material support to such movements and from the very first years of the Bolshevik state a model of independent development existed to

¹ G. Therborn, 'The Life and Times of Socialism, in *New Left Review*, 192, July-August 1992, pp.19-20.

attract the leaders of nationalist opinion in the colonies. The inspiration of the Soviet Republic and the aid it dispensed to colonial nationalists and socialists cannot be denied. But none of this detracts from the importance of the active ways in which the Communists sought to inform, organise, and mobilise anti-imperialist forces in both the colonies and the metropolitan centres. This was a task which the Communist International (Comintern) particularly entrusted to those Communist Parties located at the heart of the great European empires of the twentieth century. This thesis is an investigation into the anti-colonial work of one of them - the Communist Party of Great Britain (CPGB) - a relatively small organisation operating within the biggest of all the imperialist systems.

Although relatively little has been written on this subject, it was clear from the beginning of this enquiry that the breadth of the subject matter was beyond the scope of a doctoral thesis unless it could be focused on a particular period and by reference to specific British dependencies. I have chosen to focus on the CPGB's efforts in the period 1920-1951. This period begins with the foundation of the CPGB and is bounded at the end by the termination of the first majority Labour Government - an administration which presided over decolonisation in India, Ceylon, and Burma, but also entertained (and to some extent excused) grandiose plans for colonial development. The year 1951 was also something of a turning-point in the history of the CPGB, in that the Party adopted a new parliamentarist orientation in its programme *The British Road to Socialism* which it adopted that year. As we shall see the *British Road* also marked a break with the CPGB's earlier views on the future of the British Empire.

This thesis is restricted in scope, as well as time. The British Empire covered one-quarter of the globe and embraced territories of many varied types. It was not possible to examine what the CPGB had to say about all of them. Instead I have chosen to focus on the Indian subcontinent and, to a lesser extent, sub-Saharan Africa. These parts of the British colonial system mark extremes of development and underdevelopment in terms of the strength of indigenous nationalist and left-wing forces in the period under review. How did the CPGB

set about making political interventions within and behalf of, these distant, complex and diverse British dependencies? To what extent were the Party's colonial priorities externally or internally determined? Did it act as a cypher of the Comintern or develop a degree of autonomy in the conduct of its colonial work? Did it have any practical impact in the territories it sought to reach? Were the Communists able to find allies in Britain and find ways of bringing colonial issues to public attention? Was the CPGB handicapped by racism within its own ranks, as has recently been suggested?² These are some of the questions guiding the present enquiry.

Two bodies of work which do address this particular historiography are Stephen Howe's *Anti-Colonialism in British Politics*³ (1993) and A.J. McKenzie's *British Marxists and the Empire*⁴ (1978). However, Howe's study sets the subject of the practical anti-colonial activities of British Communists and their allies in a wider context and as a consequence the discussion of these specific themes tends to lack depth, while McKenzie's thesis was written prior to developments which have both expedited and expanded the scope of research in this area.

The Museum of Labour History in Manchester (MLH) has recently obtained from the Moscow archives minutes of the CPGB's Central and Political Committee meetings for the 1930s for example, which offer fresh insights into the nature of the Party's anti-colonial responsibilities and the relationship between the Comintern and the colonies. Published research on the British Communist Party has not yet made full use of this archive which was wholly closed until 1989. In addition, the archives of the GPGB, previously held in much disorder at Communist Party premises in London, have been transferred to the MLH, where the material has been sorted and catalogued, thus making it far more

² M. Sherwood, 'The Comintern, the CPGB. Colonies. and Black Britons', in *Science and Society*, 60, 2, Summer 1996, pp.137-163.

³ Stephen Howe, *Anti-Colonialism in British Politics*, Oxford, 1993.

⁴ A.J. McKenzie, *British Marxists and the Empire*, unpublished PhD. University of London, 1978.

accessible to researchers. Here, the papers of leading Party figures such as Ben Bradley and Rajani Palme Dutt and the International Department files were of particular value.

Professor Eric Hobsbawm recently pointed out that there are aspects of the CPGB's anti-colonial work on which primary research has not been conducted⁵ and this study attempts to make a contribution to this neglected area by accessing archive material which was closed to earlier researchers and by bringing together both original and existing research on the connections between Communists and the network of peripheral anti-colonial groups and activists operating in Britain during the period under review. Information from the Public Records Office offers some insight into the British Government's approach to African nationalists and their communist allies in the conditions which prevailed after 1945 as well as the true extent of Communist advance in sub-Saharan Africa.

⁵ E.J. Hobsbawm, 'Afterword'. in K. Morgan et al (eds.). Opening the Books. Pluto. 1994.

INTRODUCTION

Background

When the Third (Communist) International was founded in March 1919, its Bolshevik architects were determined to ensure that it would not share the fate of the Second International, which was allegedly destroyed by the separate nationalist priorities of its members, but that it would endure to provide the potent guiding force behind the international proletarian revolution. At this time, Soviet Russia was the sole existing workers' state and as such was simultaneously prototype and example, claiming the unqualified support and protection of the international workers' movement. Consequently, as prospects of a wider revolution in Europe faded and the Soviet state struggled to survive in a hostile environment, the contortions of its national policies were increasingly reflected in the policies of the Comintern, giving rise to a history of inconsistency and vacillation.

As the revolutionary focus shifted from Europe to the subject peoples of the European colonies and their struggles for self-determination, both as a means of destroying existing empires and overthrowing the leading capitalist states, Britain was identified as both the principal foe of Soviet Russia¹ and the leading imperialist power.² As such, the country

¹ Following the signing of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty in March 1918 - an accommodation with Germany which enabled Soviet Russia to withdraw from the war - Britain became the leading player in actions against the Soviet state. The negotiation of a separate peace was portrayed as an act of betrayal by the Allies, despite earlier warnings by Soviet officials that the fledgling state was in peril from the advancing German army (John Callaghan, Socialism in Britain since 1884, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1990, p.93) and Lenin's stated willingness to 'Accept arms from the Imperialist bandits' for its defence. (See Victor Serge, From Lenin to Stalin, Anchor Foundation Inc., New York, 1987, p.31.) The new regime found itself literally under siege - during the ensuing naval blockade, not only ships carrying war materials to the Bolshevik troops were turned back, but also vessels containing food. (CAB 23/18, Cabinet 8 (19), Conclusions of a Cabinet Meeting held on 20-11-1919, p.57, Cabinet Papers (in Volumes), Public Records Office, (P.R.O.) Britain's core role in the anti-Soviet campaign was admitted during a Cabinet Conference in January 1920, when it was minuted that 'we had certainly done our best to estrange the Bolsheviks who had greater reason to hate us than any other power'. CAB 23/19, Conclusions of a Cabinet Conference, held on 5-1-20, Cabinet Papers (in Volumes), p.19, (PRO)

² There were real fears among British ministers that the Bolsheviks would find common cause with nationalists in Egypt Turkey and, ultimately, India. In Turkey, where a nationalist movement led by Mustapha Kemal was gaining support, 'Britain's commercial interests had been nearly twice those of any other power', (CAB 23/19, Conclusions of a Cabinet Conference, op.cit., p.16.) whilst India was, of course,

became a primary target for the Comintern's attentions and the British Communist Party - despite its small membership and the fact that it was consistently overshadowed by the eminently more powerful Labour Party - was called upon to play a leading role in the encouragement and support of colonial liberation movements within the British Empire.

Radical Dissent From Imperialism

Before examining the impact which developments in Soviet Russia had upon the course of anti-colonial politics in Britain, it is necessary to set the context by referring to existing currents of anti-imperialist thought from which the British left's understanding of imperialism first derived. A tradition of anti-imperialist sentiment stretches back as far as the English Revolution, when the Levellers opposed Cromwell's brutal subjugation of Ireland,³ and runs through the work of campaigners such as Tom Paine,⁴ the slave trade abolitionists and the Chartist leader, Ernest Jones, who expressed his support of the 1857 Indian Mutiny.⁵ It was a sentiment which also flourished within branches of British Liberal thought, where its most notable exponents were the anti-Corn Law campaigners, Richard Cobden and John Bright - but the evolution of opposition to empire was fragmentary, springing from a range of diverse and often conflicting viewpoints.

The Cobdenite-Radical tradition itself covered various strands of argument. In line with the laissez-faire economic theories of Adam Smith,⁶ the colonial system was attacked for

the 'Jewel in the Crown'. A Cabinet Conference held in January 1920, concluded that, 'Every day they (the Bolsheviks) were making great strides towards the East . . . They were carrying out a regular, scientific, and comprehensive scheme of propaganda in Central Asia against the British'. (Ibid, p.11.)

³ Fenner Brockway, The Colonial Revolution, Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, London, 1973, p.21. The Levellers' opposition was encapsulated in the proposition; 'How can the conquered be accounted rebels, if at any time they seek to free themselves and recover their own?' Quoted in Tony Gilbert, The Movement for Colonial Freedom, draft document, 'Liberation,' London, n/d.

⁴ Paine campaigned in support of the American colonists' fight for freedom.

⁵ Jones wrote of the Mutiny that, 'It is one of the most just, noble, and necessary ever attempted in the history of the world.' Quoted in John Saville, Ernest Jones, Chartist, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1952, p.219.

⁶ Under the old Mercantile system, trade was seen as an essentially finite process - if more was exported to a trading partner than was received in imports, a healthy economy resulted. Consequently, the colonies could be justified economically as long as they were utilised in a manner consistent with the acquisition of surpluses - ultimately of gold and silver. Smith and his disciples successfully challenged this assumption, arguing < that a general expansion of trade increased the benefits to all, (as A.P. Thornton writes; 'It was not 'Empire', but the wide world itself that was the oyster, ready to be prised open by the force of British capitalist

restricting trade and necessitating high defence expenditure and - through its encouragement of imperialist rivalry - as a possible cause of wars.⁷ Bright, in describing the Empire as 'a gigantic system of outdoor relief'⁸ for the aristocracy, was articulating the view that the system perpetuated the power of this small minority, whilst campaigners such as Jeremy Bentham and J.S. Mill were concerned with more efficient government - and in the case of the non-European territories, 'civilised' government.

Concern at the mistreatment of subject peoples and the maladministration of empire motivated the humanitarian wing of Radical thought, exemplified by the activities of E.D. Morel. Between 1900 and 1913, Morel led a successful campaign against atrocities committed in the Belgian Congo by King Leopold and a handful of concessionary companies who held power in the territory. It was his belief that the only defence which the African had against exploitation by European imperialists was the determination of an ethical Europe to intervene on his behalf.⁹ Yet Morel's position was tempered by the view that the colonial peoples should cooperate with the capitalist system in order to ensure that the resources of their territories would not be lost to the world,¹⁰ and his appeal to humanitarian principle was supplemented with the argument that British trade in West Africa was being damaged by the spread of the concessionary system. Despite attacks upon the concept and operation of Empire, these early critics did not encourage withdrawal,¹¹ but merely looked askance at its expansion, especially after the outbreak of the Boer War in 1899.

enterprise.' A.P. Thornton, The Imperialist Idea and its Enemies, A Study in British Power, Macmillan and Co. Ltd., London, 1959, p.6.) and Britain, as the foremost industrial and naval power with the largest empire, was content to accept this analysis after 1815.

⁷ This was contrasted to the free trade system which, it was claimed, promoted harmony by creating international dependence.

⁸ Quoted in Bernard Porter, Critics of Empire, British Radical Attitudes to Colonialism in Africa, 1895-1914, Macmillan and Co. Ltd., London, 1968, p.12.

⁹ Frederick Seymour Cocks, E.D. Morel: The Man and His Work, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1920, p.106.

¹⁰ Morel favoured Frederick Lugard's system of Indirect Rule for the West African colonies.

¹¹ The interpretation of mid-Victorian indifference or even hostility towards Empire, has been challenged by John Gallagher and Ronald Robinson, who identified an 'informal' Empire which existed during the period and was retained and even expanded through the use of indirect methods of control. See J. Gallagher and R. Robinson, 'The Imperialism of Free Trade', in Economic History Review, Vol. VI, No. 1, 1953, p.15.

The first Socialist groups based their opposition to Empire-building on this Liberal-Radical pastiche; the Independent Labour Party (ILP) and the Marxist Social Democratic Federation (SDF), for example, and William Morris's Socialist League, which stressed the economic imperative behind the invasion of Sudan. Their failure to produce a rigorous analysis of imperialism meant that not all socialists were completely hostile to imperialist ideas. For example, Henry Hyndman - the self-aggrandising leader of the SDF¹² - wrote on Indian and African affairs¹³ in the organisation's journal *Justice*, where he denounced imperialist expansion - but Hyndman was essentially a patriot whose anti-imperialism lay uneasily beside endorsements of national self-interest.¹⁴

A similar insularity existed within the trade union movement at this time - those unions which did not express wholehearted support for the Empire tended to ignore the issue, concentrating on their immediate domestic economic and social objectives.¹⁵ The Fabian Society likewise showed little interest in colonial affairs, but when pressured by events in South Africa to join the debate on the colonial Empire, leading Fabians such as Beatrice and Sidney Webb expressed the paternalistic, even racist views¹⁶ which were common

¹² Henry Mayers Hyndman launched the Democratic Federation in 1881, this became the Social Democratic Federation in 1884.

¹³ B. Porter, op.cit., p.100.

¹⁴ It was differences between Hyndman and fellow members which caused the SDF to split in December 1884, when William Morris, Eleanor Marx, Edward Aveling, Belfort Bax and Andreas Scheu left to form the Socialist League. See John Callaghan, 1990, op.cit., Chapt. 1.

¹⁵ This remained the case throughout the inter-war years. For the most part, the TUC was as uninterested as the Labour Party in Britain's colonies, but when it was stirred to think about them it did so in conventional ways. See Philip Poirier, *The Advent of the Labour Party*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1958, p.16.

¹⁶ The perception of Western Europeans occupying the apex of a racial pyramid was reinforced by flawed anthropological and anatomical studies and by the unenlightened reaction of certain travellers to their encounters with different civilisations. Such ideas, which were systematised in Social Darwinist doctrine, were widely disseminated by a mass circulation press (Arthur Harnsworth's *Daily Mail* and Arthur Pearson's *Daily Express* for example, disseminated the imperialist ideas of John Seeley, Charles Dilke and others in an unsophisticated manner) which was established from the 1890s. For information on the spread of imperialist ideas see: H.J. Field, *Towards a Programme of Imperial Life: the British Empire at the turn of the century*, Clio Press, Oxford, 1982; Bernard Semmel, *Imperialism and Social Reform, English Social-Imperial Thought 1895-1914*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1960, pp.56-7; J.M. Mackenzie (ed.), *Imperialism and Popular Culture*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1986.

currency in late Victorian society.¹⁷ George Bernard Shaw, in a tract entitled *Fabianism and Empire*, attempted to justify imperialist expansion in terms of progress, as a step towards internationalism and a means of 'civilising backward peoples'.¹⁸ But in advocating such ideas, the Fabians were not so much addressing the politics of Empire as confronting the perceived national mood in order to move on to their real passion - domestic reforms.¹⁹

The latter years of the nineteenth century were marked by a sharp escalation of international economic competition²⁰ between the industrial powers - a development which prompted demands for protectionist measures to shield domestic industry and led to a rekindling of the imperialist idea. For example, Joseph Chamberlain, the radical ex-mayor of Birmingham, spearheaded a tariff reform campaign from 1903, during which he attempted to persuade British workers that they too would profit from Empire,²¹ if only

¹⁷ J.M. Winter, 'The Webbs and the non-white World: a case of socialist racialism', in the Journal of Contemporary History, Vol. 9, No.1, January 1974.

¹⁸ Shaw claimed that imperialism was the 'new stage of international polity' and advocated rule of 'backward' peoples by the 'civilised' races. Quoted in Bernard Semmel, *op.cit.*, pp.70-72.

¹⁹ The Webbs were influenced by Social Imperialist ideas, and joined the cry for 'national efficiency'. (See G.R. Searle, The Quest for National Efficiency, a study in British Politics and Political Thought, 1899-1914, Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1971, p.61.) In 1902 they formed The Coefficients - a steering committee of Fabians, Liberals and Conservatives - with the aim of establishing a social imperialist party. See *Ibid.*; Winfried Baumgart, Imperialism: the idea and reality of British and French Colonial Expansion 1880-1914, Oxford University Press, London, 1982, pp.170-2.

²⁰ During this period, America and Continental Europe experienced what was in effect a second Industrial Revolution, based on a convergence of science and technology.

²¹ The rehabilitation of the imperialist idea also reflected a domestic agenda. The nation was experiencing great social change during these years; a time when sections of the working-class were being enfranchised by the 1867 and 1884 Reform Acts and the deplorable plight of the nation's poor was being revealed in studies such as Charles Booth's London Life and Labour. Furthermore, to these revealing investigations was added the 'social question' - the array of half-submerged issues and interests that began forcing their attention on the political class and which heralded the political activism of unskilled workers and even a breach between the Liberal Party and its trade union allies. The Labour Representation Committee, predecessor of the Labour Party, was formed in February 1900 from an alliance of socialist groups and trade unionists. For the first time, organised labour began to look beyond the economic struggle towards the political arena, triggering fear of social unrest among the men of property. When Walter Bagehot warned in his English Constitution that the political combination of the working-class represented 'an evil of the first magnitude', which had to be countered by removing 'not only every actual grievance, but where it is possible, every seeming grievance too', he was recognising that reforms were necessary to placate the lower orders and safeguard the existing system. Quoted in J.M. Golby (ed.), Culture and Society in Britain 1850-1890, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1986, p.274. There was a growing belief that Empire provided a way of maintaining working-class living standards and increasing employment, as well as offering opportunities for emigration to Britain's unemployed and destitute people - a useful means of defusing potential domestic unrest.

the nation tied its economic destiny more completely to it. As the belief grew among modern industrial nations that their positions could only be maintained through territorial expansion, there was an acute intensification of rivalries over the remaining undeveloped areas of the globe, notably the African continent²² and a mood of national chauvinism appeared to sweep through Britain.

It was primarily in an attempt to rationalise this national enthusiasm for colonial expansion, that J.A. Hobson produced his seminal work, *Imperialism, A Study*, (first published in 1902), in which he claimed that the impetus for imperialism lay with underconsumption in the domestic economy. The analysis identified a shortage of demand in the domestic economy due to the depressed purchasing power of the national working-class - a situation which arose out of the maldistribution of wealth and income. The mass of people, struggling to purchase the bare necessities, were unable to absorb consumer goods produced from the capitalists' surplus wealth. As a result, the capitalist class increasingly looked abroad for worthwhile investment opportunities, supported in their ventures by the state.²³

Hobson quoted figures to illustrate that only a small section of the population, the finance capitalists, benefited from imperialism,²⁴ while arguing on the broader level that imperialism was both irrational and needless. His analysis implied that a more judicious solution existed within the capitalist system, for if social reforms could redistribute the nation's resources they would stimulate the extra demand required to satisfy the capitalists' desire for sales and investment opportunities, thereby removing the need for

²² The 'scramble for Africa', as it became known, is easily traceable to the Berlin Congress of 1884/5, when representatives from fifteen nations met in an attempt to ease European tensions over the partition of Central Africa, but had its beginnings in the African railway construction projects of the 1870s. See Winfried Baumgart, *op.cit.*, p.4.

²³ H.N. Brailsford shared this view of capitalists as rational beings who would not wish to risk the economic cost of war. He wrote in March 1914, just five months before the outbreak of the First World War, 'My own belief is that there will be no more wars among the six Great Powers'. See H.N. Brailsford, *War of Steel and Gold*, 1914, p.35.

²⁴ According to these figures, while Britain's trade with the new colonies represented an 'utterly insignificant part of our national income', expenditure on these territories amounted to 'an immeasurably larger sum'. J.A. Hobson, *Imperialism, a study*, Unwin Hayman Ltd., London, 1988, p.39.

imperialism. The popularity of disadvantageous imperialist policies among the general public was explained in terms of a giant confidence trick, in which patriotism was used to screen the true situation from the British people. The 'party, the press, the church, the school'²⁵ were responsible for the inculcation of imperialist ideas; the remedy was as simple as apprising the people of the true situation, knowledge which they would use to change the system.

It was on these various threads of anti-imperialist thought that the Labour Party drew when formulating its approach to imperialism. Radical sentiments of free trade, internationalism, anti-militarism and hostility to secret diplomacy permeated the Independent Labour Party, for example, and were reflected in the works of Kier Hardie and George Lansbury. The work of Hobson²⁶ provided Labour with a theoretical manual for its opposition to Conservative colonial policy, but on a more general level, it was the Radical-Humanitarian approaches which influenced the small group of intellectuals concerned with colonial affairs, many of whom belonged to the Party's Advisory Committee on Imperial Questions.²⁷ Thus the Labour Party in practice stood for good administration, free trade, native paramountcy, ultimate self-government and opposition to colonial expansion.

Overall, the British left tended to remain detached from the deliberations and discussions of continental socialists and thus from their theories of imperialism²⁸ throughout the early years of the twentieth century - Lenin's hugely influential work, *Imperialism, the Highest stage of Capitalism*, was not translated into English until 1926. In consequence, their influences tended to be Hobsonian or even Gladstonian and many of the early leading Socialists exhibited imperialist and sometimes racist attitudes. A striking example is

²⁵ Ibid., p.233-4.

²⁶ Hobson is generally regarded as the precursor to J.M. Keynes.

²⁷ Labour's interest in colonial affairs was largely confined to this group which included Leonard Woolf, who served as secretary of the ACIQ; Sir John Maynard, the Committee's chair; Charles Roden Buxton, Major Graham Pole; Sydney Olivier and E.D. Morel.

²⁸ Such as Rudolf Hilferding's seminal *Das Finanzkapital* of 1910.

provided by the labour movement's promotion of a pamphlet entitled *Black Horror on the Rhine*, in which E.D. Morel²⁹ condemned the decision to station French colonial troops in the Ruhr in blatantly racist language.³⁰ Others feared that attacks against the British Empire would alienate the masses - Tom Quelch of the British Socialist Party argued the point at the Comintern's Second International Congress.³¹ This then, was the form of anti-imperialism in Britain during the three decades prior to the formation of the CPGB; it was an approach which the Communist Party, armed with Leninist theory, was soon to challenge.

Theoretical Developments

Marx himself had not initially attributed great importance to the role of the less-developed countries in the struggle to advance international socialism, believing as he did that the industrial nations were the womb from which the world revolution would be delivered. But Lenin, who consistently advocated the right of every nation to self-determination,³² was clear that the cause of national liberation provided a useful weapon with which to assail the capitalist powers. Commensurate with this view, he steered the Bolshevik Party to a distinctive and uncompromising stance on colonial independence which established anti-imperialism at the heart of communist ideology and, in doing so, served to emphasise the poor record of the Second International on this issue.

Many leading figures in the Second International did not share Lenin's interpretation of the changing world situation.³³ Some argued that Marxist predictions of capitalism in crisis, the pauperisation of the workers and the polarisation of labour and capital were

²⁹ A founding member and first secretary of the Union of Democratic Control, formed in August 1914.

³⁰ The article was published in the *Daily Herald*, Britain's leading left-wing newspaper, and subsequently reproduced in *New Leader*, the ILP's journal. Resolutions condemning the use of African troops were passed by the Labour party, the ILP, womens' groups and trade unions. See Robert C. Reinders, 'Racialism on the Left, E.D. Morel and the "Black Horror on the Rhine"', in *International Review of Social History*, Vol.XIII, 1968, p.1.

³¹ Stuart MacIntyre, 'Imperialism and the British Labour Movement in the 1920s: an examination of Marxist Theory', in *Our History* pamphlet, No. 64, Autumn 1975, Journeyman Press, London, p.12.

³² The Bolsheviks upheld the right of national minorities to secede from the Tsarist Empire, although this was to a large extent adopted as a tactical measure.

³³ Including some of those on the left - Jean Jaures and August Bebel, for example.

inaccurate.³⁴ In *Imperialism*, Lenin attempted to rebut these claims whilst simultaneously providing a theoretical framework of imperialism and guiding its practical application. This was an eclectic work, inspired to some degree by the economic ideas of Hobson, although it differed fundamentally from the analyses of Hobson and the other Radicals in that it identified imperialism as a specific stage of capitalist development, rather than a mere policy adopted by the capitalist class.

Bukharin had been the first Bolshevik to advance the theory of finance capital, arguing that, as capitalism developed, a concentration of production occurred which inevitably resulted in the formation of monopolies. He observed a parallel process in the financial sector, where a merger of large-scale industry and commercial enterprises with the big banks led to what he termed 'a coalescence of banks and industrial capital'.³⁵ Because monopolies acted to stifle competition in the domestic sphere, there was a consequential accumulation of surplus capital which, when exported overseas, yielded vast super-profits. It was the search for these super-profits, together with a requirement for raw materials and cheap labour, which was identified as providing the central motive for colonial expansionism.³⁶ But whereas Bukharin had concluded that the dawning of the age of international finance capital would render nation states obsolete, Lenin recognised that uneven development meant that for some countries, nationalism remained very relevant.

What *was* different in Lenin's theory was his identification of an imperialist epoch characterised by wars, civil wars and revolutions - one which represented the expiration of the capitalist system. Rivalries between the modern industrial nations over undeveloped territories were accelerating, yet, as he pointed out, the world had already

³⁴ Opposition to the Leninist position also came from the redoubtable Rosa Luxemburg who, influenced by developments in her Polish homeland, tended to take a nihilist attitude towards nationalism, regarding it as a reactionary force which posed a threat to international socialism. See A. Reznikov, The Comintern and the East: Strategy and Tactics, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1984, p.34.

³⁵ Nikolai Bukharin, quoted in V.I. Lenin, Imperialism: the Highest Stage of Capitalism, Progress Publishers, Moscow, 1970, p.60.

³⁶ V.I. Lenin, Collected Works, Vol. XIX, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1968, p.156.

been divided among the large capitalist powers by 1900,³⁷ leaving re-division as the only option. In widening the theory of class exploitation to cover the global division of labour Lenin, as Neil Harding acknowledges, 'introduced a wholly new geopolitical framework to ideological discourse.'³⁸ He predicted that competitive expansionism would inevitably lead to conflict and, following from this, he was able to cite the First World War as an example of an imperialist war - it being the denouement of the established imperialist powers' attempts to thwart German imperialist ambitions.³⁹

When formulating his treatise, Lenin set out to affirm this connection between capitalism, imperialism and war in an attempt to refute the views of some socialists - notably leading members of the German and Austrian Social Democrats - who claimed that the globalisation of capitalism was a process which could actually *reduce* the risk of war. Karl Kautsky's concept of ultra-imperialism,⁴⁰ for example, and Otto Bauer's assertion that capitalism could continue to expand indefinitely without the support of a colonial empire, were bitterly denounced by Lenin as an encouragement of the workers to self-delusion. The message he endeavoured to communicate was that the interests of the working peoples of all nations lay in opposing imperialism and not in following the example of the majority of Socialists in the Second International, who had abandoned their previous commitment to internationalism in order to support the war efforts of their respective governments.⁴¹

³⁷ During the so-called 'scramble for Africa', nine-tenths of that continent had been seized, leaving re-division as the only option. V.I. Lenin, 1970, op.cit., p.174.

³⁸ Neil Harding, *Leninism*, Macmillan Press Ltd., 1996, p.138.

³⁹ Although the First World War is generally understood in terms of the new Germany's challenge to the 'old order', as epitomised by Britain, the main protagonists were all existing or aspiring imperial powers acting out their own thinly-veiled imperialist agendas. In the aftermath of the war, colonial possessions were redistributed among the victors; Britain's Empire increased and the popularity of the colonial-empire grew, but not without cost. The war had severe economic and moral implications for Britain, not least its radicalising effect upon the colonial peoples who bore much of the suffering and whose expectations rose accordingly.

⁴⁰ See Nikolai Bukharin, *Imperialism and World Economy*, Merlin Press, London, 1972, p.142; Anthony Brewer, *Marxist Theories of Imperialism, a critical survey*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1980, pp.122-6.

⁴¹ The failure of Socialism to prevent the imperialist war and the general absence of revolutionary fervour among the European working-class was attributed by Lenin to the creation of a 'labour aristocracy'. Neville Kirk confirms that certain cotton operatives saw themselves as 'lords of labour: the manual aristocrats', and Elie Halevy claims that a number of the British proletariat were 'able to keep up a standard of living almost

Leninist logic allowed for no compromise with capitalism, revolution was the only road and those who were not prepared to wholeheartedly follow the revolutionary path were dismissed as stooges of imperialism. The polemical essence of this reasoning was encapsulated in his assertion that 'He who is not for us is against us'.⁴² The core of his analysis was that mankind had reached a crossroads; 'Leninism categorically defined a time for all humanity - now is the moment of choice between Socialism and barbarism',⁴³ and the relentless rise of fascism in Europe as the international capitalist system teetered on the brink of destruction throughout the 1920s and 30s, seemed to bear witness to the accuracy of his predictions.⁴⁴

Lenin's ideas offered fresh insight into both the historical process and the global politics of the time. But as Neil Harding astutely observes, the theory of imperialism was also 'compass and chronometer of Leninism and contemporary communism',⁴⁵ in other words it was the most important component of the ideological rationale for the Communist movement, this most ideological of political parties - a fact that is not generally recognised. Within this rationale, Lenin's great innovation was to place the colonial liberation struggle in the vanguard of the battle against both imperialism and capitalism with the intention of enlisting the subject peoples in the international proletarian struggle. *Imperialism* offered an explanation for the inequalities which distorted economic conditions in the colonies and semi-colonies and provided the oppressed peoples with a

as high as that of the middle-class. See N. Kirk, The Growth of Working-Class Reformism in mid-Victorian England, Croom Helm Ltd., Kent, 1985, p.85; E. Halevy, Imperialism and the Rise of Labour, 1895-1905: A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century, Vol.5, Ernest Benn Ltd., London, 1961, p.212. The analysis included a warning that such an unholy alliance, forged with a system doomed to collapse, would merely facilitate the ruling classes' descent into authoritarianism and political reaction, as they struggled to defend their position.

⁴² V.I. Lenin, 1968, op.cit., Vol. XXIX, p.294.

⁴³ Neil Harding, op.cit., p.115.

⁴⁴ For many, disillusioned by the gratuitous slaughter of the 1914-18 war, their faith in democracy badly shaken, Lenin's theory of capitalist collapse and continuous conflict struck a chord. As Europe 'slumped into monumental melancholy' (Modris Eksteins, *The Rites of Spring*, Black Swan, London, 1990, p.340) in the post-war years, civil strife flared in Germany, Hungary, Poland, Ireland and Italy; Turkey and Greece were at war; the Middle East simmering - all seeming to confirm the view of the birth of a turbulent new age.

⁴⁵ Neil Harding, op.cit., p.141.

way out of their growing frustrations. For those communists operating within the imperialist powers, Leninist principles ensured that support of colonial liberation became a defining part of their Socialism.

Plotting The Course

Following the Bolshevik's victory in October 1917, steps were taken to convert theory into a programme of practical action. Despite an official policy of parity between the component national parties of the Communist International, Russian delegates enjoyed a permanent majority on the organisation's Executive Committee, ensuring that the influence of the Bolsheviks - later the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, (CPSU) - was paramount. This was illustrated to some extent by the reaction of delegates to the separate theses relating to the national and colonial question, proposed by Lenin and the Indian delegate, Menenabandra Nath Roy,⁴⁶ at the Second Comintern Congress in 1920.

Lenin's prioritising of the colonial question was based on his belief that colonial exploitation was actually prolonging the life of the capitalist system and that a proportion of the colonial superprofits was being offered as an incentive to leading sections of the national working-class, creating a 'labour aristocracy' which consorted with the capitalist system. But, although he acknowledged the vital importance of colonial liberation movements to the revolutionary struggle, he continued to lay greatest stress^{on} the role of the Western proletariat.

According to Lenin's analyses, imperialism functioned to stunt economic development in the colonies, constricting the growth of the working-class and giving rise to mainly rural, peasant populations. However, he believed that the predominance of pre-capitalist

⁴⁶ M.N. Roy, who was involved with Bengali terrorists during his early years, travelled to the U.S. as a member of the Berlin-based Indian Independence Committee in 1916. Whilst in America, he collaborated with the Ghadr Party - a revolutionary Sikh organisation - and met his future wife and co-worker, Evelyn. The two moved to Mexico the following year, where they encountered the prominent Russian Communist, Michael Borodin, who had been charged with the task of forming a Communist Party of Mexico. Roy subsequently converted to Communism, arriving in Moscow at the end of 1919. See David H. Druhe, Soviet Russia and Indian Communism, Bookman Associates, New York, 1959, p.28.

relations did not necessarily pose an impediment to progress. It was possible for these countries to bypass the capitalist stage of development altogether with the aid of the international revolutionary movement - and he instructed workers of the imperialist powers to guide and support those liberation movements operating in their respective nations' subject territories.

He concluded that, because the modern class structure was insufficiently developed in these subject territories for Communist parties to flourish there, it was inevitable that the bourgeoisie would take the lead in the nationalist struggle. Communists therefore, should enter into a temporary alliance with bourgeois democracy in the colonies and the undeveloped nations.⁴⁷ There was no question that this strategy would lead to a diminution of the Communist Party's organisational independence. Its main purpose was to 'rally the constituent elements of the future proletarian parties',⁴⁸ support of national self-determination could only ever be a step towards internationalism.

Roy carried Lenin's arguments further; if capitalism was being shored up by massive profits from the colonial territories, he reasoned, it was axiomatic that 'the fate of the revolutionary movement in Europe depends entirely on the course of the revolution in the East'.⁴⁹ He identified two separate movements within the colonies and semi-colonies: bourgeois-democratic nationalism, which aspired to independence within the capitalist system, and the struggle of the poor peasants against exploitation by both the imperialist power and their own native bourgeoisie. It would be wrong, he contended, to support the former to the detriment of the latter - the anti-imperialist movement must develop as a *class* revolution.

⁴⁷ Jane Degras (ed.), The Communist International 1919-1943, Vol. 1, 1919-22, Frank Cass and Co. Ltd., London, 1971, p.141.

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.143.

⁴⁹ Quoted in Stuart MacIntyre, Autumn 1975, p.11.

To illustrate his position, Roy referred to India as an example of a subject territory which was undergoing a process of 'rapid industrialisation' and, in the process, creating a proletariat which would eventually unite and rise against capitalism in a situation akin to that in the West. Already, he contended, the revolutionary movement was gathering strength among the poor. Given these circumstances, it would be a mistake to trust the national bourgeoisie; they would prosper as industrialisation advanced, eventually allying with feudal elements and co-operating with the imperialist powers against the workers and peasants.

Lenin further muddled the waters with his perception of a world political system shaped by the struggle between the Soviet movement, headed by Soviet Russia, and the imperialist powers. He argued at the second Comintern congress that it was only from this premise that 'the political questions of the Communist Parties, not only in the civilised but also in the backward countries can be posed and answered correctly'.⁵⁰ Communist policy was thus directed towards creating 'a close alliance of all national and colonial liberation movements with Soviet Russia', the forms taken by this alliance to be determined by 'the stage of development reached by the Communist movement of each country or by the revolutionary liberation movement in the undeveloped countries and among backward nationalities'.⁵¹

In the event, Roy's theses enjoyed 'at least as much sympathy of those of Lenin',⁵² and were adopted on a supplementary basis, ensuring that communists were pledged to support as suitable allies only those bourgeois-democratic national liberation movements judged to be 'really revolutionary', or willing to employ communist tactics.⁵³ But the ambiguity inherent in an analysis which allowed Communists to make common cause

⁵⁰ R. Archer, The Second Congress of the Communist International Vol. 1, New Park, 1977, p.110.

⁵¹ J. Degras, op.cit., p.141.

⁵² E.H. Carr, The Bolshevik Revolution, a History of Soviet Russia 1917-23, Vol. 3, Macmillan and Co. Ltd., London, 1961, p.254.

⁵³ In this manner it was accepted that - in certain circumstances - it was possible for the colonial bourgeoisie to follow a revolutionary path.

with the national bourgeoisie in the liberation struggle whilst simultaneously agitating for the class struggle and aspiring to its leadership, gave rise to a number of mistakes and uncertainties.

Problems Of Application

As it was openly admitted by Communists that these alliances were temporary expedients, designed to achieve the ultimate overthrow of the bourgeois leadership, it is unsurprising that the nationalist leaders tended to regard their new 'allies' with suspicion. This mistrust, compounded by the problem of how to decide if a national liberation movement was 'truly revolutionary' would, in the case of the Chinese Kuomintang in 1927, cause a great reverse for the communist movement. Similarly, the issue of whether to co-operate with the Indian National Congress^(INC), which was long-established by 1920 and enjoyed mass support under Gandhi's leadership, continued to divide communists even after India's independence was won.

Despite the atheist nature of Communist ideology, support for the forces of national liberation extended in some cases to movements of a religious character. Following the 1917 Revolution, Soviet Russia received considerable support from Moslem populations within its borders and the Communists attempted to build on this. At the first Congress of the Peoples of the East, held in Baku in 1920, Gregory Zinoviev, chief of the Comintern, roused delegates towards a 'holy war' against British imperialism while casting Soviet Russia in the role of protector of the oppressed in an attempt to win over the Moslem masses to the fight against Western imperialism.⁵⁴ But such alliances were littered with pitfalls, as the ill-fated collaboration between Communists and Sarekat Islam - the Indonesian Islamic nationalist movement - proved.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ This accommodation was evident at the Executive Committee of the Comintern's Third Plenum on Religion in 1923, when Bukharin instructed Communists to 'emphasise that they are proposing a fraternal alliance with all workers, whether believers or atheists'. See S. MacIntyre, op.cit., p.11.

⁵⁵ Sarekat Islam initially won the support of Communists and was even commended to the second Comintern congress by the Dutch representative, Henric Sneevliet - alias Maring - who accorded it with revolutionary credentials and even a 'class character'. (E.H. Carr, op.cit., p.256.) During the early 1920s, the mass base of Sarekat Islam became increasingly radical - a development misinterpreted by Indonesian

Most frustrating for those Communists charged with the task of fulfilling Lenin's design was the millstone which equated the interests and preoccupations of Soviet Russia with those of the international communist movement. By 1921, as the Bolshevik state struggled to find a foothold in the international polity of nations, the Comintern had initiated the united workers' front policy of selective co-operation with European Social Democracy and the colonial national bourgeoisie.⁵⁶ This policy changed in 1928 as Stalin, who replaced Lenin as Soviet leader after his death in 1924, introduced his own, more simplistic interpretation of Leninist analysis.

For reasons expedient to Stalin's factional struggle inside the CPSU, the New Line stressed that only the proletariat embodied the universal aspirations of mankind and therefore, in the struggle for national independence, only the proletariat - through their representatives, the Communists - could provide leadership. As Stalin tightened his grip on power and moved to isolate his critics, the ultra-left strategy - which shunned co-operation with non-Communist elements in Europe and the subject territories - was employed. It was a course to which the anti-colonial politics of the European Communist Parties were expected to conform and as such, had particular implications for the CPGB.

Conclusion

Prior to the second decade of the twentieth century, the main body of anti-imperialist thought in Britain sprang from humanitarian beliefs and moral principles emanating from Gladstonian liberalism, supported by a secondary current of Radical criticism derived from Hobson's *Imperialism*. Opposition to colonial expansion was based on objections to the oppression of the subject peoples, or on the financial burden which the colonies were said

Communists as a movement towards their own position. This error, together with Stalin's repression of non-Russian minorities and the condemnation of Pan-Islamism in theses approved by the Comintern's second congress, led to the crushing of the Communist Party of Indonesia in 1926. See F. Claudin, *The Communist Movement*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1975, p.244; A. Reznikov, op.cit., p.110.

⁵⁶ It was reasoned that, if successful, the policy would awaken the workers' interest in Marxist ideas and move their leaders to the left; if the strategy failed, these same leaders could be blamed and ultimately overthrown.

to represent to the metropolitan power. Even early Marxists accepted aspects of the Radical analysis of imperialism and many Socialists were susceptible to racial stereotypes and delusions of racial superiority and inferiority, which the supporters of Empire promoted. Although the ideas of J.A. Hobson offered an economic explanation for imperialism, they did not represent a significant break with the prevailing view of imperialism as the machinations of a small group of finance capitalists determined to increase their profits.

Lenin, however, formulated a distinctive analysis which reassessed both the nature of contemporary capitalism and its historical evolution.⁵⁷ He identified the beginning of a new imperialist epoch for mankind, an epoch of wars, civil wars and revolutions providing the objective conditions for revolutionary Socialist politics. Indeed, he talked of the end of capitalism and beginning of Socialism and insisted that this must be an immediate, revolutionary transition, not a gradual process of change as others argued. It was a position which tolerated no dissent and those who questioned it were dismissed as supporters of imperialism.

The analysis of a new historical age of imperialism which 'means the progressively mounting oppression of the nations of the world by a handful of Great Powers',⁵⁸ explained the position of the colonial peoples. Its conception of imperialism as a global phenomenon was supposed to unite the proletariat in the developed states with the peoples of the exploited nations in a united front against imperialism. But in addition, Lenin offered the subject peoples the vision of Socialism and increasingly the Soviet Union was exalted as the inspiration of that Socialism, the image of what could be achieved in economic development, political independence and racial equality.

Behind these apparant simplicities lay numerous traps. For Communists, support of the national liberation struggle was only ever a means towards the international proletariat

⁵⁷ Neil Harding, *op.cit.* p.264.

⁵⁸ Quoted in A. Reznikov, *op.cit.*, p.6.

revolution and the establishment of Socialism, never an end in itself. This inevitably led to problems with bourgeois nationalist leaderships and religious elements who might regard the goal of independence as an end in itself, fearing the Communists as unreliable allies in the struggle and certain enemies in the future. As the Bolshevik revolution became ever more isolated and insular, so Socialism and the international proletarian struggle became increasingly identified with the nature and interests of the Soviet Union. Support of Soviet policies was used as a measure of political virtue and internationalist credentials in particular, creating great problems for the membership charged with implementing the Comintern's anti-colonial policies. Responsibility for the day-to-day conduct of this work fell to the national CPs of the imperial powers. To what extent this duty was fulfilled by British Communists is the subject of this thesis.

CHAPTER ONE: EARLY COLONIAL WORK AND POLICIES 1920-27

Colonial Campaigners on the Left

In spite of the wide-spread ignorance in Britain of the emerging Leninist theoretical framework of anti-imperialism, some radical activists were ready to embrace Bolshevism, at least in part because of their public opposition to imperialism. Most notable were Rajani Palme Dutt,¹ who subsequently became the Communist Party of Great Britain's chief theorist on India and editor of the Party's periodical, *Labour Monthly*, his brother Clemens Dutt and Shapurji Saklatvala, Battersea North's Communist M.P. from 1924-1929.² Prior to the formation of the CPGB in 1920/1921, Palme Dutt served on the Labour Party's Advisory Committee on International Questions, LPACIQ, a sub-committee of its National Executive Committee (NEC) established in 1918, alongside fellow communist sympathisers Robin Page Arnot and Emile Burns.³

While in this position they were perhaps able to influence the tone and content of policy statements intended for the NEC on such issues as Indian Constitutional reform. In December 1919 for example, the ACIQ passed a resolution recommending to the NEC that, when the Government of India Bill went before Parliament, it should press for 'some extension of the principle of responsible Government to the Central Government of India', and for 'Adequate representation of the urban workers in the new provincial legislatures in view of the extent of special representation being accorded to capitalist interests'.⁴ Certainly these views were unusually radical for the Labour Party of 1919.

¹ Dutt was a prime mover in the unsuccessful campaign to persuade the ILP to affiliate with the Comintern.

² Saklatvala was previously a Labour M.P. from 1922-1924.

³ The LPACIQ was formed in May 1918, and reorganised into sub-committees on economic, political and imperial questions in February 1920.

⁴ Minutes of a Meeting of the Labour Party Advisory Committee on International Questions, 12-12-19, Labour Party Archive (henceforth LPA), Manchester Museum of Labour History.

Saklatvala, who spoke in support of colonial independence at ILP conferences,⁵ was also a member of the Imperial sub-committee of the joint TUC/LP International Committee until 1924, during which time he participated in deputations to Edwin Montagu⁶ in 1921 and 1922 and to Sidney Olivier after his appointment to the India Office in 1924.⁷

Following the formation of a Labour Government in 1924, Saklatvala insisted that the new administration could 'do a great deal in their Indian policy to abate this exploitation without affecting their administrative responsibility under the existing order of things'.⁸ He called for actions which included raising the level of wages, abolishing the impressed labour system, encouraging trade unions and labour representation, extending education and reforming the judicial system.

This early accommodation of left activists within the advisory hierarchy of the Labour Party and TUC was in no way a reflection of either their enthusiasm for anti-colonialism or the emergence of the Bolshevik state in Russia. Prior to the October Revolution, Arthur Henderson warned of a looming crisis between 'the existing and, in his eyes, admirable 'moderate Socialists' (the Kerensky Government) and the 'extremists' who would hang them all from lamp-posts, Lenin's group representing the latter tendency.'⁹ The Labour leadership subsequently supported the British Government's hostile policy towards Soviet Russia in the wake of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, albeit primarily to avoid disunity while the war remained in progress. But despite the position of their leadership, sections of the British labour movement rejoiced at the birth of what they believed to be the first workers' state, responding to its plight with the launch of a 'Hands off Russia' campaign in the Spring of 1918.¹⁰

⁵ Mike Squires, *Saklatvala, a political biography*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1990, p.162.

⁶ Secretary of State for India, 1917-1922.

⁷ Marjorie Nicholson, *op.cit.*, p.152.

⁸ S. Saklatvala, 'The British Labour Government and India', T.U.C. and Labour Party Joint International Department memo, No. 9, July 1924, p.1, (LPA).

⁹ A.J. Williams, *Labour and Russia: The attitude of the Labour Party to the USSR, 1924-34*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1989, p.7.

¹⁰ A national 'hands off Russia' Committee was subsequently established in January 1919 to co-ordinate activities which culminated in the refusal by London dockers in May 1920 to load the 'Jolly George' with munitions destined for the anti-Soviet forces of General Pilsudski.

Preparing the Ground

When the CPGB was formed from the consolidation of a handful of Marxist groups on the periphery of the labour movement in August 1920, it faced the prospect of repeated attempts to affiliate to an essentially hostile Labour Party - a foretaste in British conditions of the united front strategy adopted by the whole of the Comintern in 1921. It also encountered problems in adjusting to the organisational dictates of the Comintern. The new party's residual origins had bequeathed an undisciplined internal structure, while isolation from theoretical developments in the rest of Europe left its members adhering to a rigid Marxist model which pre-dated Lenin's directive towards a revolutionary stratagem. Such a situation could not be tolerated in a highly centralised organisation which demanded strict obedience to the official line.

Pressure was put on the CPGB to reorganise according to Bolshevik principles and in March 1922, a Commission consisting of Harry Pollitt, Harry Inkpin and chaired by Palme Dutt, was appointed to implement the changes.¹¹ Of central importance was the Party's acceptance of its responsibilities in the anti-imperialist campaign. These were stressed as early as the second Comintern Congress in 1920, when British delegates were informed that they 'would be judged, not by their articles in favour of liberation, but by the numbers of them imprisoned for agitation in Ireland, Egypt or India'¹²

In June 1921, the Party was warned that 'The British Empire is the knot which Socialism in this country will have to unravel if it is to succeed.'¹³ The imperative to practical action was reiterated in November 1922 when, at the fourth Comintern Congress, it was stated in 'The Colonial Tasks of the Metropolitan Parties', that 'The extreme importance of the colonial revolutionary movements for the international proletarian revolution makes it

¹¹ John Callaghan, *op.cit.*, 1993, p.43.

¹² Jane Degras, *op.cit.*, p.139.

¹³ John Langland, 'Our Imperial Responsibilities', in The Communist Review, No. 2, June 1921, p.4.

necessary to intensify work in the colonies; in the first place by the Communist parties of the imperialist powers'.¹⁴

Many in the CPGB were slow to grasp the significance of this directive, eliciting strong criticism from the Comintern as late as 1924, when it complained of the Party's draft programme that 'references to the colonies and protectorates are of the most obscure nature'.¹⁵ Nevertheless, by the mid-1920s the CPGB had progressed to the point where, outwardly at least, 'racialist sentiments disappeared and all Communists acknowledged the importance of liberating the colonies',¹⁶ allowing the Party to concentrate on strategy. Most significant was the fact that the British Party included among its ranks the emerging colonial experts mentioned earlier - and aspiring Indian experts in particular - which the young Comintern did not possess.

It was during 1924 that the Comintern established a Colonial Bureau in Paris and, more importantly, devolved responsibility for anti-imperialist work within the British Empire to the CPGB. In response, the British CP formed its own Colonial Committee, which claimed in September 1925 to have established 'working connections' with India, Egypt, Palestine, Syria, South Africa, Canada, Australia, New Zealand and Ireland.¹⁷

This assertion was undoubtedly an exaggeration, though James Crossley did travel as the Party's representative to Palestine and to Egypt, where he assisted in the establishment of the Egyptian Communist Party.¹⁸ It was during 1925 that Ralph Fox was sent to Moscow to work in the Comintern's Colonial Department - concentrating mainly on India in conjunction with Goldberg and M.N Roy¹⁹ - and Clemens Dutt, who served as the British

¹⁴ Jane Degras, *op.cit.*, p.392.

¹⁵ 'The Draft Programme of the CPGB Criticised', in The Communist Review, Vol. 5, No. 4, August 1924, p.186.

¹⁶ Stuart MacIntyre, Autumn 1975, *op.cit.*, p.12.

¹⁷ HMSO, *Communist Papers*, (Documents seized by the British authorities in 1925), CMND, 2682, Vol. XXIII, pp.632-751, 1926, p.95.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.97.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.105.

CP's representative on the Comintern's Colonial Bureau, joined the Berlin-based 'Foreign Bureau of the Communist Party of India', established in 1922 by Roy.²⁰

On an agitation and propaganda level, the *Workers' Weekly*, launched in February 1923 with Rajani Palme Dutt as editor, devoted an increasing percentage of its space to international and colonial affairs. For example, articles covered the persecution of workers in Turkey, repression in Egypt, forced labour in Kenya, imperialism in Cyprus, South Africa, Iraq and Ireland, as well as comprehensive coverage of events in India. The paper adopted an uncompromising anti-imperialist tone; early issues proclaimed 'Mass Murder in India', when discussing the actions of the British authorities at Amritsar, and Ramsay MacDonald's Socialist administration fared no better. Palme Dutt attacked the record of the Labour Government in India in 1924 under the headline 'Blood, Brutality, Forced Labour, Do British Workers Stand For This? Down With The Imperialists!'²¹

Achieving a Wider Constituency

This activity contrasted sharply with developments in the Labour Party, some of whose members, including leading left-wingers, had been captivated by the concept of Empire Socialism by 1925. The argument that it was possible to develop the Empire along Socialist lines, bringing benefits to both Britain and the colonies, was politically expedient at a time of mass unemployment, when the British economy was under increasing pressure from rivals in Europe and the United States - a fact emphasised by the

²⁰ By 1915, Indian revolutionaries operating in exile had co-operated with the Germans to form the Indian Independence Committee in Berlin. This Committee was dissolved in 1918 by Virendranath Chattopadhyaya, sole leader of the Indian radicals at this time, who had become close to the Communists. Chattopadhyaya formed the Indian News and Information Bureau in 1921, and that same year sent an American journalist, Lockmann, to London to make contact with Indians resident there. Following consultations between the organisation and members of the CPGB, the Foreign Bureau of the CPI was set up - its mission being to contact Indian and European labour organisations. Chattopadhyaya subsequently joined the Communists, but tensions developed as both he and Roy claimed to be the leader of Indian Communism. See Sir Cecil Kaye, Communism in India, with unpublished documents from the National Archives of India 1919-1924, Editions India, Calcutta, 1971, pp.166-7, 233, 225 and 337; A.C. Bose, Indian Revolutionaries Abroad, 1905-1922, Bharati Bhawan, Patna, 1971, p.194.

²¹ Workers Weekly, 7-3-24, p.1.

CPGB.²² While the Labour Party's tendency towards a bi-partisan approach on foreign and colonial issues undermined the confidence of many colonial activists in its will to effect change, the Communists were championing the colonial peoples' demands for freedom in word and to some extent by deed, whilst attacking Labour's equivocal position on these issues.²³ One of the CP's singular claims, articulated by J.R. Campbell in September 1924 for example, was that 'The Communist Party is the only anti-Imperialist party in Britain today.'²⁴

During the inter-war years, Marxist theories of imperialism were able to gain a credence with the left in Britain to a degree which far outweighed the status of the CPGB.²⁵ For example, many leading members of the 'Plebs League', a group founded by militant students at Ruskin College, Oxford, in 1909, were CP members or sympathisers during the 1920s. Morgan Philips Price and Arthur Cook;²⁶ Walton Newbold, the first Communist M.P.; William Mellor; Ellen Wilkinson; Willie Paul; Maurice Dobb; Raymond Postgate and T.A. Jackson were all active in the League. The organisation's publication, *Plebs*, edited by Frank Horrabin, provided a platform for Marxist views up until the late 1920s.²⁷ The India League²⁸ also inclined towards a Leninist position on the nature of imperialism by the late 1920s²⁹ and its secretary, Krishna Menon, was accepted by Communists as a trusted comrade.³⁰

²² J.T. Murphy, 'The Empire Conference and the Workers', in The Communist Review, Vol. 4, No. 7, November 1923.

²³ Hugo Rathbone wrote 'Every pretence of 'Left Wing' leaders that sweating can be abolished without the necessity of breaking up the capitalist Empire', condemned colonial workers to economic and political oppression. 'By this means their mistrust and fear for all that is white even though it calls itself 'Labour' is again a thousand times confirmed.' See H. Rathbone, 'Should the Empire be Broken Up?', in The Communist Review, Vol. 6, No. 4, August 1925, p.173.

²⁴ J.R. Campbell, 'Must the Empire be Broken Up?', in The Communist Review, Vol. 5, No. 5, September 1924, p.224.

²⁵ Membership had reached around 2000 in 1920. See J. Callaghan, 1990, op.cit., p.97.

²⁶ Arthur Cook was a founder member of the CPGB, who resigned from the Party in 1921. Philips Price was a CPGB member until 1923.

²⁷ Stuart MacIntyre, A Proletarian Science, Marxism in Britain, 1917-1933, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1980, pp.73-86. See also S. MacIntyre, Little Moscows, Croom Helm, London, 1980.

²⁸ The India League was a British-based pressure group, set up to further the cause of Indian independence in this country.

²⁹ F. Brockway, The Colonial Revolution, Hart-Davis, 1973, p.37.

³⁰ John Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., p.201.

In the years which immediately followed the end of the First World War, unemployment rose relentlessly in Britain, triggering a period of trade union militancy which persisted until the 1926 General Strike. During these years, left activists such as Harry Pollitt were able to rally the movement in support of the struggling Bolshevik Government in Russia³¹ and to push forward the anti-imperialist campaign. The T.U.C.'s Parliamentary Committee declared in 1921 that 'no measure will be satisfactory which does not give Indian workpeople the same rights as those possessed by Trade Unionists in this country',³² and in 1924, the General Council was instructed by Conference to take up the issue of Irish political prisoners with the British Home Office.³³

But the most radical resolution on imperialism was moved by A.A. Purcell of the National Amalgamated Furnishing Trade Association, in 1925. It declared its complete opposition to Imperialism and resolved 'to support the workers in all parts of the British Empire to organise the Trade Unions and political parties in the British Empire to self-determination, including the right to choose complete separation from the Empire.'³⁴ Despite implacable opposition by J.H. Thomas - the right-wing railway workers' representative who served as Colonial Secretary in Labour's 1924 administration - the resolution was passed by an overwhelming majority.³⁵

The Labour Research Department, an initiative of various trades unions, co-operative societies and Guild Socialists, was controlled by communists from 1921. Tom Bell, head of the CPGB's Agit-Prop. section, confirmed in 1925 that the LRD was 'not a Party

³¹ A resolution authorising the General Council to set up a Russian Famine Relief Fund and to use the power of organised British labour to induce the Government to recognise the Bolshevik regime was passed at the 1921 Annual Conference. See Report of the 53rd. Annual T.U.C. Conference, Cardiff, 5-10th September, 1921, pp.345-352, T.U.C. archives (TUCA), Congress House, London.

³² Report of the 53rd. Annual T.U.C. Conference, Cardiff, 5-10th September, 1921, p.84, (TUCA).

³³ Report of the 56th Annual T.U.C. Conference. Hull, 1-6th September, 1924, p.450, (TUCA).

³⁴ Report of the 57th Annual T.U.C. Conference, Scarborough, 7-12th September, 1925, pp.553-4, (TUCA).

³⁵ The vote registered 3,082,000 in favour and 79,000 against.

concern, but is under the control of the Party'.³⁶ Rajani Palme Dutt served as its International Secretary until 1922, when he was succeeded by his brother Clemens.³⁷ During 1926 and 1927, Elinor and Emile Burns produced a number of pamphlets for the Department, in which they argued from a Marxist perspective on imperialism and issues relating to its operation within the British Empire. These included *British Imperialism in China*, *British Imperialism in Malaya*, *British Imperialism in East Africa* and *British Imperialism in West Africa*,

The publications on Africa, for example, addressed the question of capitalist profits, of forced labour and land rights, the detrimental impact which the use of compulsion on a huge pool of African labour would have on the conditions of the British worker and the long-term implications for class struggle in the African colonies. *British Imperialism in East Africa* claimed that 'There is perhaps no country in the world where the working of the capitalist machine is more nakedly revealed than in East Africa'.³⁸

It was an area where the imperial power had complete control of the means of production and of labour supply, an area which was being 'developed' in the interests of European capitalists by European financiers, supported by the imperialist governments. Here, where the climate was more conducive to Europeans, the British Government expropriated land and established legal rights of ownership for the benefit of European settlers, forcing Africans into reserves which were also being steadily eroded. Having been robbed of his land, the African was then taxed into wage labour. In the early stages of capitalist development, Indian workers were imported to provide this labour at the cost of much suffering - of 32,000 workers brought from India to work on the Uganda railway, 6,450 were invalided as unfit to work before the end of the operation and 2,490 died.³⁹

³⁶ Quoted in Neal Wood, *Communism and British Intellectuals*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1959, p.79; *Inprecorr*, Vol. 5, 6-5-1925, p.538.

³⁷ J. Callaghan, 1993, *op.cit.*, pp.20 and 43. Members included Robin Page Arnot, Hugo Rathbone, Emile Burns and William Mellor.

³⁸ Elinor Burns, *British Imperialism in East Africa*, Labour Research Department, Colonial Series No.1, 1926, p.4.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p.11.

At this juncture, the article concluded, the African workers as a class had no organisation, not even the first stages of trade unionism, but antagonisms were growing - the 1922 rising in Nairobi ⁴⁰ was quoted as an example - and the advent of a nationalist movement was proclaimed inevitable. There was as yet no native capitalist class in East Africa; the moment when it emerged 'must represent the organised resistance of workers and peasants to their exploitation by British capitalists'.⁴¹

British Imperialism in West Africa pointed out that an alliance of British finance and heavy industry required 'the constant flotation of loans and the placing of contracts for railway material, bridges and harbour works on a steadily increasing scale.'⁴² Railways and public works were being constructed by forced labour (although this was one of the points on which British policy in the area was supposed to differ from policy in East Africa) and the profits were going to British capitalists.

It was, Burns argued, the British Government's intention to create and train 'a labour supply for capitalism'.⁴³ British Imperialism's increasing reliance on colonial investments as a source of profits was affecting the economic development of the colonies - in order to force Africans to become part of the capitalist process, their traditional link with the land had to be broken and a new link with wage labour forged. This was done by lowering prices paid to peasant producers for their products and increasing taxation. In East Africa the hut or poll tax and the expropriation of land were the methods used - in West Africa

⁴⁰ Resistance to higher taxes, land robbery and forced labour was led by Harry Thuku, who was subsequently arrested and imprisoned. A spontaneous demonstration outside the prison was fired upon by police, resulting in the deaths of some thirty men, women and children. Thuku, who was not brought to trial, was deported to the coast, where he was kept in detention.

⁴¹ Ibid., p.64.

⁴² Elinor Burns, *British Imperialism in West Africa*, LRD, 1927, p.53. The pamphlet pointed out that Lord Kysant, chair of the Elder Dempster Shipping Company, which operated along the West African coast, was also a director of the Bank of British West Africa and the Midland Bank, both of which operated to finance the West African projects.

⁴³ Ibid., p.61.

peasant producers were more heavily taxed than waged workers to the extent of a quarter of their yearly income.

But the transformation of the peasantry into a wage-earning class and the interference with tribal land and the economic life of the villages was leading to direct conflict between the state and the indigenous population, Burns predicted. The workers who were forced to become wage labourers and the peasant producers whose markets were disappearing would develop into a conscious opposition. The articles also linked the exploitation of colonial workers in West and East Africa to domestic unemployment and the lowering of standards for British workers; British imperialism was the 'common enemy of both the organised workers at home and the new proletariat of the African colonies'.⁴⁴

This informed analysis supplemented the colonial theses of the Comintern, which were mostly formulated in general terms, and required - though did not always receive - sensitive application to specific regions and territories. However, the lack of a proletarian base in the African colonies ensured that Communist efforts in this direction were principally propagandistic and educational; practical interventions necessarily focussed on Asia for the most part during the inter-war years.⁴⁵ It was not until the Fourth Comintern Congress in November 1922 that the 'Black Question' was first incorporated into the

⁴⁴ Ibid., p.64.

⁴⁵ From the early 1920s, a small number of Africans and black Americans attended the Communist University of the Toilers of the East, or KUTV, which was founded in 1921 by Stalin's Commissariat for Nationalities. Bankole Awooner-Renner, otherwise known as Kweku Bankole, and Isaac Wallace Johnson were two West Africans who were educated there. (See Hakim Adi, 'West Africans and the Communist Party in the 1950s', a paper presented to a Conference on the History of the British Communist Party, Manchester, January 1994; Woodford McLennan, 'Blacks in the Comintern Schools, 1925-34, in International Journal of African Historical Studies, Vol. 26, Part 2, 1993, pp.371-390; Marika Sherwood, The Comintern and Colonies until c1934, Paper presented to School of Oriental and African Studies African History Seminar, December 1993). Afro-American students included Harry Heywood and Otto Hall, later leaders of the negro liberation movement in the USA, and William Patterson, an Afro-American lawyer who served as chair of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples. See William L. Patterson, The Man Who Cried Genocide, International Publishers, New York, 1971, p.101; also Claude McKay, A Long Way From Home, Arno Press, New York, 1969, p.165, 180.

official agenda,⁴⁶ in line with Comintern observations of an awakening consciousness among Africans and people of African descent, especially black Americans.⁴⁷

Initiatives Within Britain

Much of the Communist movement's work with colonial activists was carried out under the auspices of the Red International of Labour Unions, RILU, which was founded in July 1921.⁴⁸ The organisation's British Bureau was formed during the early 1920s, with Tom Mann - previously an organiser for the Seamen's Union - as its president, and Nat Watkins as its secretary.⁴⁹ Mann also served as chair of the The National Minority Movement, NMM, established as an offshoot of the RILU in November 1923, which held its first national conference in August 1924. The organisation, whose officers included Harry Pollitt, secretary; George Fletcher, treasurer and George Hardy, national organisational secretary, shouldered some of the responsibility for colonial work in Britain.

The International Section of the NMM's programme pledged 'Full support for the trade union movement in the colonies in their fight against imperialism,'⁵⁰ a task underlined in 1929 by an RILU directive. 'Your movement must now offer real support and help to the labour movement in all the colonies of the British Empire . . . directly helping them to establish revolutionary trade union organisations.'⁵¹ This included responsibility for

⁴⁶ During this Congress, plans for a Congress of Negro Peoples were drafted by a committee which included the British Communists William Gallagher and Walter Hannington; Israel Amter of the CPUSA and Sen Katayama, who served as secretary. See 'The Comintern and Africa', in African Communist, No. 43, 1970; T. Draper, The Roots of American Communism, Elephant Paperbacks, Chicago, 1989, p.387.

⁴⁷ The Comintern decided to implement a policy of using American negroes to further the struggle for liberation in Africa. See D. Ramsay, 'The Negro Arrives', in Communist Review, Vol. 6, April 1926, pp.543-5; Harry Heywood, Black Bolshevik, Liberator Press, Chicago, 1978, p.225. It was a strategy indicative of the distorted thinking of Comintern leaders; the contacts needed as a base from which to operate simply did not exist outside South Africa and attempts to train Americans in Moscow for this work generally failed as most chose to return to the USA rather than carry the message to the African continent. E.T. Wilson, Communism and Black Africa before World War Two, Holmes and Meier Publications Inc., London, 1974, p.131.

⁴⁸ A. Lozovsky was appointed General Secretary of the RILU.

⁴⁹ Arthur Horner, Incorrigible Rebel, MacGibbon and Key, London, 1960, p.65.

⁵⁰ NMM, Programme of Action, Draft Discussion Document, 20-3-29, Box 1, Jack Tanner Collection (JTC), Nuffield College Library, Oxford.

⁵¹ Directive from the Executive Bureau of the RILU to the NMM Conference, 17-8-29; Letter, A. Losovsky - general secretary of the RILU - to the E.C. of the NMM, 15-8-29, in Box 1, (JTC).

establishing close contacts with colonial workers in Britain. The NMM's fifth annual conference passed a resolution to 'actively support' such bodies as the League Against Imperialism, the Pan-Pacific Secretariat and the Workers' Welfare League of India (WWLI)⁵² and by September 1929, the Movement had formed a Colonial Committee.⁵³

The bulk of the CPGB's work with Indians in Britain was initially directed by Shapurji Saklatvala, who was active in the Indian Labour Bureau in London, established by the Profintern in 1923, and the Oriental Seamen's Union. He played a leading role in the British branch of the INC, of which Fenner Brockway was joint secretary prior to 1920, and shouldered overall responsibility for Party work conducted among the increasing number of Indian students studying at British universities during the inter-war years. Saklatvala also served as a long-term official of the WWLI, which became the All-Indian Trade Union Congress's British agent in 1921.⁵⁴

Oriental Seamen's Union

On the 25th February, 1923, a meeting was held to discuss the establishment of an Indian Seamen's Association (ISA), in Britain. Those present included Saklatvala - who subsequently became the organisation's president - Ajoy Banerji, Pulin Dinda, and J.C. Sen. Speakers were George Lansbury, Nat Watkins and Potter of the RILU, who drew up a constitution for the Association. The Executive Committee included Banerji and two lascar lodging-house keepers who performed the duties of assistant secretaries.⁵⁵

At an ensuing meeting of the organisation, which was held on 8th. April and attended by Mackenzie of the National Union of Seamen, it was agreed that the ISA should henceforth be known as the International Oriental Seafarer's Union.⁵⁶ The international Communist

⁵² Report of the fifth NMM Conference, August 1928, pp.24-5; Report of the sixth NMM Conference, August 1929, p.15, Box 1, (JTC).

⁵³ Minutes of an NMM Executive Bureau Meeting, 6-9-29, citing correspondence from CPGB's Colonial Committee, Box 1, (JTC).

⁵⁴ Marjorie Nicholson, op.cit., p.152.

⁵⁵ Sir Cecil Kaye, op.cit., pp.233-4; M. Squires, op.cit., p.148.

⁵⁶ Sir Cecil Kaye, op.cit., p.233-4.

hierarchy was well aware of the communications and propaganda value of such an organisation - similar bodies operated in ports such as Hamburg and Marseilles. The following month, Saklatvala was instructed by the RILU to 'make full use (of the ISA) as a communist propaganda organisation.'⁵⁷ But, understanding the importance of not confining the new initiative to a narrow political line, he insisted that the organisation retain some independence. In response to his arguments, the RILU did not demand the affiliation of the new organisation - accepting instead a declaration of shared principles.

The initiative however, was not a success, prompting Khan of the London-based Indian Bureau to complain in July 1925 that a proposal to form a union among Indian seamen in Britain - direct responsibility for which, he claimed, lay with N.J. Upadhyaya - had not been carried out.⁵⁸ In response, Communist leaders sought to widen the work among colonial seamen under the auspices of the NMM. In a directive to the British Party, dated September 1925, the ECCI criticised the lack of progress in this area and ordered the CPGB to extend its Minority Movement work to cover the textile and seamen's industries.

E.H. Brown, the CPGB's representative to the ECCI, attempted to soften the rebuke by acknowledging the attention already given to this work by the British Party, and at the same time stressing the importance of the CPGB's anti-colonial work to the Comintern. The union was finally established with the assistance of the NMM at a meeting of Indian seamen held on 20th September 1925, when the proceedings were chaired by George Hardy and Upadhyaya was the main speaker.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Quoted in Ibid., p.85.

⁵⁸ Report of Amsterdam Conference, in Communist Papers, op.cit., p.81. This claim contradicts a report by the Young Communist League in July 1925, that the RILU had recently formed an Oriental Seamen's Union with branches in London and Edinburgh. See Resolution on Colonial Work adopted by the YCL Congress, in Ibid., p.89.

⁵⁹ International Seafarer, Vol. 1, No. 10, August-September 1925, 'Indian Seamen's Union Formed', p.10.

The Worker's Welfare League of India

The Workers' Welfare League of India was created in 1917 by A.G. Field to campaign for Indian workers' rights. Its first general secretary was J. Potter Wilson, an ILP dissident who subsequently joined the CPGB; Saklatvala served as secretary of its India Committee from 1917.⁶⁰ Potter Wilson was later replaced as general secretary by Saklatvala as the League oriented towards the Communist Party, but it was not a Communist-front organisation from its inception. In the early years, the emphasis of the League was on reform, the right of Indian workers to trade unions and democracy, and it ensured that these issues were discussed at Parliamentary level.⁶¹ Potter Wilson also made full use of the British press to spread the WWLI's message.⁶² The League later developed links with African workers - a delegation representing Nigerian workers attended the League's 1930 Conference, for example,⁶³ - and passed resolutions on the troubled situation in China.

From the outset, the League was anxious to involve the British TUC in the struggles of Indian labour, but growing tensions between British trade union leaders and Communists soon affected the League's position in Britain. In 1920, the TUC's Parliamentary Committee agreed to allow a fraternal delegate from the League to attend its Portsmouth Congress, but when Saklatvala was nominated he was refused entry, ostensibly because he did not also represent a trade union. Yet at this time he was not a CP member and he continued to work on the Labour movement's Imperial sub-committee until 1924.

Furthermore, the TUC was prepared to waive the rules in the case of E.N. Nxumalo, who was allowed to represent the Swazi nation and the ANC despite the fact that he had no trade union status.⁶⁴ In the face of this rebuff, the AITUC nominated Saklatvala and B.

⁶⁰ M. Squires, *op.cit.*, p.158

⁶¹ The Labour M.P. Mardy Jones was involved with the League.

⁶² CP/ORG/MISC/6/9, Letter, J.E. Potter Wilson to City News Editor, Daily Mail, 29-2-32, also Minutes of a WWLI Meeting, 10-3-32, Communist Party of Great Britain archive (CPGBA), Manchester Museum of Labour History.

⁶³ CP/ORG/MISC/6/10, WWLI Annual Report, 1930-31, (CPGBA).

⁶⁴ M. Nicholson, *op.cit.*, pp.167-168.

Horniman - the militant Irish editor of the *Bombay Chronical* - as delegates to the TUC's Cardiff Congress. The TUC's Parliamentary Committee responded by ruling that all fraternal delegates must be resident and members of trade unions in the country which they represented - a decision which precluded both Saklatvala and Horniman from attending.⁶⁵

In the wake of communist expulsions from the Labour Party in 1924, the WWLI was increasingly ostracised by the hierarchy of the labour movement, leaving it vulnerable to absorption by the Communists who - just a year later - were claiming that; 'The (CPGB's Colonial) Department directly influences the Welfare League.'⁶⁶ The League was considered by the CPGB to be of great value to its anti-colonial work - as the recognised representative organisation of the AITUC in Britain it was able to obtain space for its views in a substantial number of Indian papers. Consequently, the decision was taken in 1925 to strengthen and develop its influence.

When, in May 1930, the Executive Bureau of the NMM decided that the link between the AITUC and the NMM must be made 'a real live force', it was to the League that the NMM wrote, asking them to cooperate in raising funds to send two delegates from India to the Fifth World Congress of the RILU.⁶⁷ But by the late 1920s British trade union leaders, alarmed at the Communists' progress in India, were attempting to establish their own links with the Indian labour movement.

In 1927, a TUC delegation to the Eighth AITUC Session - which convened from 26th to 28th November in Cawnpore⁶⁸ - persuaded the EC of the AITUC to sever its links with the League and appoint the British TUC as its agent in Britain. Saklatvala immediately condemned N.M. Joshi - who was elected general secretary of the AITUC in 1925 - for

⁶⁵ M. Nicholson, *op.cit.*, p.152.

⁶⁶ Report of CPGB's Colonial Committee, in *Communist Papers*, *op.cit.*, p.100.

⁶⁷ Minutes of an NMM Executive Bureau Meeting, 16-5-30, Box 1, File 2, (JTC).

⁶⁸ This delegation attended the eighth session of the AITUC, held in Cawnpore on 26th-28th November, 1927. Mardy Jones also attended.

collaboration with British imperialism and began campaigning for the League's reinstatement. Following protests from Indian trade unions, the AITUC Congress held in Jharia during December 1928 agreed a compromise and declared that it would no longer have any affiliated agents in Britain.⁶⁹

Seizing on this as a sign of indecision, the League passed a resolution the following June urging the AITUC to reinstate the League,⁷⁰ and forwarded it to all trade union organisations in India. This appeal was successful and the WWLI was reinstated as the AITUC's representative in Britain at the Nagpur Session in November, 1929,⁷¹ when the Congress left were in the ascendant.

Despite the hostility of TUC leaders, the League managed to retain some influence within that organisation prior to 1929 mainly through A.A. Purcell - secretary of the Manchester and Salford Trades Council⁷² - and through its links with Arthur Pugh.⁷³ But following the imposition of the ultra-left phase in 1928, the organisation lost much of its remaining support in the labour movement.⁷⁴ Walter Citrine, the general secretary of the TUC, attacked Saklatvala and the WWLI in the *Daily Herald* in April 1929, maintaining that although the League once did excellent work for Indian workers, it was now part of the Minority Movement and thus operating under the dictates of the RILU.⁷⁵ In response the League declared that it 'repudiates imputations that it is controlled by any other organisation.'⁷⁶

⁶⁹ CP/ORG/MISC/6/10, WWLI Annual Report, December 1928, (CPGBA).

⁷⁰ CP/ORG/MISC/6/10, Appeal for the Meerut Prisoners, June 1929, (CPGBA).

⁷¹ Saklatvala had been appointed WWLI delegate to the Nagpur Session, but the Labour government refused to provide him with a passport. CP/ORG/MISC/6/10, WWLI Doc., n/d, c1929, (CPGBA).

⁷² CP/ORG/MISC/6/10, WWLI Doc., n/d, c1929, (CPGBA).

⁷³ M. Nicholson, op.cit., p.154.

⁷⁴ Even as late as 1927, 78 trade union branches were affiliated to the WWLI. See M.Squires, op.cit., p.160.

⁷⁵ CP/ORG/MISC/6/10, WWLI, The British TUC and the WWLI, 20-4-29, (CPGBA).

⁷⁶ CP/ORG/MISC/6/10, Minutes of a WWLI Meeting, 18-6-28, (CPGBA).

At this juncture the League was claiming the affiliation of 95 organisations - including Shoreditch Trades Council, North Camberwell ILP and Battersea Shop Assistants Union - 26 individuals and four Indian trade unions.⁷⁷ The organisation continued to provide speakers for ILP meetings throughout the Communists' ultra-left period, Dr. Bhat for example, addressed the youth section of Peckham ILP and East Dulwich ILP during 1932.⁷⁸

During the early 1930s, the League was increasingly prone to financial problems and internal wrangling as the Communists attempted to take total control. At a Central Committee Meeting of the CPGB held in June 1930, George Allison complained that the WWLI had issued only one bulletin on India that year and urged the Party to give more attention to the composition of the League, whose EC then consisted of 25, ten of whom were CPGB members. These ten included George Hardy, Saklatvala, Percy Glading, Glyn Evans - who acted as assistant secretary - and Upadhyaya.⁷⁹

In July 1930, the CPGB passed a resolution which stressed the importance of the League's work. 'The Party must work actively among the Indian residents in Britain . . . and establish the best possible connection with India through them'. But the effects of the divisive 'third period' made progress extremely difficult. Treasurer and League founder, Arthur Field, announced in March 1932 that the organisation was bankrupt, with debts outstanding to the president, Dr. K.S. Bhat.⁸⁰ It was at this juncture that a split became apparent between the British and Indian sections, as Saklatvala stressed the need for more Indian members.⁸¹ Acrimony also surrounded a decision by Field to issue a circular which called for a boycott of the LAI as a Communist organisation. The WWLI had

⁷⁷ CP/ORG/MISC/6/10, WWLI Doc., n/d, c1929; CP/ORG/MISC/6/9, Minutes of a WWLI Meeting, 23-4-32, (CPGBA).

⁷⁸ CP/ORG/MISC/6/9, Minutes of WWLI Meetings, 29-1-32 and 23-4-32, (CPGBA).

⁷⁹ Reel 1, Minutes of a CPGB Central Committee Meeting, Discussion on Indian resolution; CP/ORG/MISC/6/9, Minutes of WWLI Meetings, 3-1-32, 29-1-32, (CPGBA).

⁸⁰ CP/ORG/MISC/6/9, Letter, A, Field to WWLI Committee, 10-3-32, (CPGBA).

⁸¹ CP/ORG/MISC/6/9, Minutes of a WWLI Meeting, 19-3-32, (CPGBA).

previously sent delegates to the LAI's 1928 and 1931 Conferences,⁸² and Field was accused by Saklatvala of trying to curry favour with the TUC by attacking the LAI.⁸³

In defiance of this opposition the Indian section appointed Dr. Bhat, K. Sheldrake and A.C. Banerji as delegates to the 1932 LAI Congress, at a meeting in May of that year. This elicited a furious response from Field and his supporters, who protested at the Indian section's actions during a full League meeting in June. Saklatvala countered by moving a resolution endorsing the actions, which was passed, a move which prompted the resignation of the chair, Dr. Bhat. A subsequent resolution, proposed by Saklatvala and seconded by Sheldrake, stated that 'all reference to Mr. A. Field's statement and also to the resolution passed by, or statements made by, the Indian Section be deleted from the records of the League, and not be mentioned or referred to again.'⁸⁴

Field resigned from the League on 10th September and subsequently wrote to Banerji - then assistant secretary - of his disapproval of the 'illegal and irregular procedure approved by a small majority in the monthly meetings' and the policy of 'undertaking fresh expenditure without an attempt at paying the debts of the League.' He also took issue with a WWLI bulletin, (the second of the series), for its imputation that communal riots and violence in India were being engineered by the government, and requested that his name be removed from all future WWLI material.⁸⁵

Towards the end of the 1920s, fissures in the WWLI were mirrored in the British arm of the INC, as Saklatvala launched an attack on non-Communist members of the branch. Mohamed Uj Jafar, first president of the British INC had been succeeded by Beatle Bhia, who adopted a more moderate political stance and attempted to steer the organisation towards a softer line. This led to his censoring the views of one of the more radical

⁸² In 1931, K. Sheldrake, Day and A.C. Banerji had attended the LAI's Conference as WWLI delegates.

⁸³ CP/ORG/MISC/6/10, Letter, Saklatvala to Indian Section members, 18-5-32, (CPGBA).

⁸⁴ CP/ORG/MISC/6/9, Minutes of a WWLI Meeting, 23-6-32, (CPGBA).

⁸⁵ CP/ORG/MISC/6/9, Letter, Field to Banerji, 13-9-32, (CPGBA).

members - Sajjad Jahir - and precipitated strong protests from the Communist faction, including an accusation by Saklatvala that Bhia was a supporter of British imperialism.⁸⁶

In June 1931, the branch split and a large number of members left. Saklatvala took the chair and the twenty-three remaining members decided to form an alternative anti-imperialist organisation of Indians in Britain. But the INC, unable to sanction this new sectarian group as its official representative, disaffiliated it in August 1931. The communists subsequently formed the Independence of India League - an initiative which soon floundered.⁸⁷

We may pause here to note that this profile of the WWLI is suggestive of certain general features of the Communist's anti-colonial work in the inter-war years. The Party was fertile in devising forms of organised intervention and energetic in sustaining a variety of related groups; but the organisations were hampered by their reliance on key activists, their lack of deeper and broader support and by the episodes of Communist sectarianism which drove scarce allies away. We shall see that this pattern is repeated, but also that it does not tell the whole story.

Indian Students in Britain

The Young Communist League (YCL), also played an important role in recruiting colonial students to the communist cause. The third Congress of the International YCL, held in Moscow during November and December 1922, laid great stress upon the obligations of the British League in this area and, in a resolution on colonial work adopted by the organisation's 1925 Congress, it was stressed that 'Much work could be done among the Indian students in London and at other university towns by agitating against British Imperialism.'⁸⁸ In response to such urgings the British YCL appointed a

⁸⁶ Nirmal Sen Gupta, The Influence of Communism amongst the Indian Students in London, Nishan Publishers, Calcutta, 1989, Chpt. 3.

⁸⁷ The Daily Worker, 29-6-1931 and 28-1-1932

⁸⁸ Resolution on Colonial Work, in Communist Papers, op.cit., p.89.

committee⁸⁹ to contact Indian students in Britain with the aim of winning them to Communist ideas⁹⁰

The overwhelming majority of these overseas students came from wealthy, middle-class families to train for professional careers which they intended to pursue upon their return to India, but many became involved with the British CP and extended their studies to include the works of Marx and Lenin. A considerable number of these went on to occupy positions of power in post-independence India - Mohan Kumaramangalam, later a Minister in Indira Gandhi's government; Nikhil Chakravarty, editor of the *Mainstream* journal and Indrajit Gupta, presently leader of the Communist group in the Indian Parliament were some of those who developed connections with the CPGB whilst living and studying in Britain.⁹¹ Jyoti Basu, who later rose to become Chief Minister of Bengal in the 1980s, was recruited by the CPGB in the mid-1930s, while he was at the Middle Temple, qualifying for the Bar.⁹²

There were a number of Indian student societies at British universities which had close connections with the CPGB, notably the Majlis - which existed at Oxford, Cambridge and London - and the Federation of Indian Students' Associations or Fedind, which had branches in Britain, Northern Ireland and continental Europe. Rajani Palme Dutt was closely involved with the activities of Fedind, earning from student members the title 'patron saint of the Fedind'.⁹³ In the late 1920s, Sajjad Jahir - the Indian Communist whose speeches triggered disruption in the INC meetings referred to above - took over the editorship of the quarterly *Bharat*, produced by Oxford University's Indian students, and transferred publication to London. Re-named *New Bharat*, the journal became totally supportive of the Communist position. Nirmal Sen Gupta acted as sub-editor, T.A. Jackson was among those contributing and Clemens Dutt vetted the articles before they

⁸⁹ This committee was set up during 1924.

⁹⁰ Sir Cecil Kaye, op.cit., p.87.

⁹¹ Author's conversation with Ralph Russell, 12-7-95.

⁹² Andrew Whitehead, 'Calcutta Compromise', in *New Statesman and Society*, 20-11-1992, pp.19-20.

⁹³ A. Mitra, 'Marxism in India', in *Seminar*, Vol. 178, New Delhi, June 1974, pp.43-46.

were printed. The paper was sent to India for distribution and its subscribers included Radha Krisnan - a future president of India.⁹⁴

Following the success of the 1927 Brussels Congress against imperialism, Communists were swift to appreciate the value of international conferences as a means of contacting young colonial activists. A World Youth Peace Conference, held in August 1928, provided an excellent opportunity for Communists to meet and influence students from various colonial countries. Several Indians who were studying in Britain at this time attended, including Rajinda Prasad, who became the first president of the Republic of India.⁹⁵

The manner in which the CPGB recruited colonial students is illustrated in Nirmal Sen Gupta's account of his student days in this country during the late 1920s. While attending a meeting of the Teachers' Labour League in Liverpool, Sen Gupta met the economist, Maurice Dobb, who introduced him to one of his students at the London School of Economics (LSE) identified only as 'Tony'. Tony was attempting to organise a Communist group from amongst the colonial members of the London University Socialist Society (LUSS) and persuaded Sen Gupta to help. Sen Gupta subsequently rented a flat close to the university and participated in meetings at which the main topics discussed were the political nature of a future independent Indian state and the relevance of Marxist/Leninist theories to the issue. Eventually, a Communist group was formed and considerations turned to whether its members should join the CPGB; the majority view being that Communists of whatever nationality should support the CP of the country in which they were residing.⁹⁶

This was a point under general discussion at that time - many in the CPGB felt that secrecy was necessary with regard to the Communist affiliations of Indian students, a

⁹⁴ N. Sen Gupta, op.cit., Chpt. 3.

⁹⁵ Ibid., Chpt. 1.

⁹⁶ Ibid., Chpt. 2.

view endorsed by Sneevliet, who cited the experience of the Dutch CP, which had been unable to use valuable colonial members because they had become known to the authorities. But M.N. and Evelyn Roy argued that these sympathisers should be urged to join the Party openly and to continue the fight on their return to India, using the courts if necessary for propaganda purposes.⁹⁷

Involvement in Communist activities certainly caused problems for the students; according to D.N. Druhe, such activities led to an investigation by the Chancellor and Proctors of Oxford University in 1926, following which those implicated were threatened with expulsion if they refused to sign a pledge ending their association with the CP. I can find no record of this incident in either of the two references given by Druhe, however.⁹⁸

Sen Gupta experienced similar pressure whilst at London University. He obtained copies of a banned booklet written by Percy Glading, in which the author recorded discussions held between Gandhi and British officials at the 1930 Round Table Conference,⁹⁹ and distributed them to LSE students. His actions came to the attention of the Principal, a hard-line administrator from an Ulster background, who immediately informed Scotland Yard and the India Office, whilst threatening the student with expulsion. It was only after protests by lecturers and the LUSS that he was allowed to complete his course.¹⁰⁰

It was the CPGB's intention to use the students as emissaries in their country of origin. Leading Party members such as William Rust and Saklatvala met with Indian students as they neared the end of their studies and urged them to return to India and practice Communism there - in Saklatvala's case, duties included re-establishing contact after they had returned home. In 1925, two non-Indian graduates compiled a memo. for the CPGB's Colonial Department, listing the political composition of the student membership of the

⁹⁷ Report of the Amsterdam Conference, in *Communist Papers*, op.cit , pp.87-88.

⁹⁸ D.H. Druhe, op.cit., p.74.

⁹⁹ These discussions concerned the maltreatment of anti-British demonstrators in India by British soldiers.

¹⁰⁰ N. Sen Gupta, op.cit., Chpt. 4.

Oxford Indian Majlis. Arthur MacManus, head of the CPGB's Colonial Department, sent Saklatvala a copy of the memo. with a request that he interview sympathetic students before they returned to India, adding that small, informal meetings would produce the best results.

The students were divided into five categories; moderates, Swarajists, Socialists, government supporters and unclassified. The Socialists were naturally regarded as the CP's best immediate candidates for membership, while the Swarajists were seen as possible future recruits ¹⁰¹ In some cases it was arranged that they should travel to Berlin to continue their training and occasionally to Italy thereafter - Roy was particularly anxious that they should establish contact with the European India Bureau. In Sen Gupta's case, Rajani Palme Dutt - who was ostensibly recovering from T.B. in Belgium - arranged a meeting with the Indian students and instructed them to publish articles on politics in the capitalist press in their home country.¹⁰²

There were constant problems with the security forces. British intelligence monitored the political activities of colonial students - Sen Gupta's passport was impounded following a visit to Berlin and restored only after intervention by a member of the Indian Government's Law Commission - and forwarded the information to their respective governments. In 1936, the fifth Indian Political Conference passed the following resolution: 'This Conference strongly condemns the espionage and strict control over Indian students in England by the British Government. It demands the abolition of the Educational Department of the High Commissioner which . . . is a great hindrance in securing educational facilities for Indians in Europe. It further demands the immediate dismissal of advisers to Indian students at various British Universities, especially Oxford and Cambridge, for their anti-Indian and imperialist outlook, for their interference with

¹⁰¹ Letter, Colonial Department to Saklatvala, 23-6-25, in Communist Papers, op.cit., pp.75-7.

¹⁰² N. Sen Gupta, op.cit., Chpt. 4.

political education, activities and opinions of Indian students and for their utter incompetency and uselessness in being of any help to Indian students'.¹⁰³

Although the bulk of its work was with Indians, a general election to decide on the separation of Burma from India in November 1932 was an opportunity for the CPGB to develop links with Burmese students in Britain.¹⁰⁴ Reginald Bridgeman and Saklatvala established contacts with activists in Burma and Burmese students in Britain¹⁰⁵ through the Burmese Students' Union in London.¹⁰⁶ On 28th May, 1933, a meeting of Burmese students and CP members, arranged jointly by the Burmese League and the Burmese Students' Union, agreed to form a study circle of those students 'considered most reliable', to discuss Marxist ideas. Those present at the meeting included Myat Tun, who worked in the High Commissioner's Office and was considered 'a very handy comrade'.¹⁰⁷ The training of Burmese activists in Britain and the setting up of a Burmese Club in London was discussed and the students were apprised of the importance of translating Marxist books, pamphlets and other literature, and how to utilize non-Communist, anti-imperialist elements and the national press.¹⁰⁸

M.N. Roy

Parallel with the work being conducted among Indians in Britain, the Comintern was concerned to actively promote revolution in India itself. M.N. Roy, who had been a founder member of the Mexican CP and led that country's delegation to the second Comintern Congress, was initially accepted by Lenin and the Comintern as the leading spokesman of incipient Indian Communism. He was sent to Tashkent as one of three

¹⁰³ CP/IND/MISC/7/6, Resolutions of the fifth Indian Political Conference, July 11/12th., 1936, (CPGBA).

¹⁰⁴ In Burma, where there was a Western-educated sector of the population which harboured nationalist aspirations, sporadic disorder broke out during the 1920s and 1930s. The Monagu-Chelmsford reforms, which were introduced into India in 1919, were extended to Burma in 1923, following a period of unrest, but disorder continued unabated. Burma was separated from India on April 1st., 1937, despite a popular vote against the move.

¹⁰⁵ CP/CENT/PC/17/5, Letters and Documents, n/d, n/t, (CPGBA).

¹⁰⁶ CP/CENT/PC/17/5, Letter from the secretary of the Burmese Students' Union, 1-10-1932, (CPGBA).

¹⁰⁷ CP/CENT/PC/17/5, Report on a 'Burmese Meeting', 28-5-33, (CPGBA).

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

representatives of the Comintern's Central Asian Bureau in October, 1920,¹⁰⁹ where he attempted to form a revolutionary army of Indian emigres which would infiltrate India through Afghanistan and agitate for a popular uprising.

These efforts were unsuccessful however, differences surfaced between the militants, and the initiative was abandoned. Unhappy with the Comintern's decision to end its support of the revolutionary army and with the terms of the Anglo-Russian trade agreement of 1921 - which restricted anti-British propaganda - Roy went to Berlin, where he published the *Vanguard of Indian Independence*, later renamed *The Masses of India*, and worked to establish a CP in India. In addition to corresponding with Indian militants and furnishing them ^{with} monies, one of his first moves on arriving in Berlin was to assign Charles Ashleigh¹¹⁰ to the task of establishing links with Indian Communists, a mission which ended five days after Ashleigh's arrival in Bombay on 18th September, 1923, when he was deported.¹¹¹

With the closure of the Tashkent military school, Communist attention switched to the AITUC, created in the same year under the presidency of Lajpat Rai. Although the development of the Indian labour movement since 1918 had been guided by a cautious constitutionalist leadership, AITUC leaders displayed a sympathetic attitude to the Soviet Union. When comparing the economic conditions of Indian workers with those of their European counterparts, the organisation's chairman, Chaman Lal, declared that the 'continuence of such conditions meant the coming of Bolshevism in India'.¹¹²

Both Lal and Rai were in close contact with British Communists through Saklatvala¹¹³ - Lal, who was also a Member of the Legislative Assembly and secretary of the

¹⁰⁹ The Central Asian Bureau was established at the Comintern's second Congress.

¹¹⁰ Ashleigh, alias John Ashworth or Nandalal, was deported from the US in February 1922 for involvement in strikes and riots there. He travelled to Britain and then on to Berlin, from where Roy despatched him to India.

¹¹¹ Sir Cecil Kaye, op.cit., p.207.

¹¹² E. Roy, 'The Crisis of Indian Nationalism', in *Labour Monthly*, Vol. 2, No. 2, February 1922, p.15.

¹¹³ Sir Cecil Kaye, op.cit., p.152.

Parliamentary Socialist Society, his colleagues T.C. Goswami and N.M. Joshi, held several conferences with the CPGB's Colonial Department during a visit to London in 1925 and expressed their desire to visit the USSR.¹¹⁴ But in the opinion of Roy, who believed that the only way Communism could progress was by establishing a CP to lead the workers' struggle, these nationalist and labour leaders were not 'real revolutionaries', but stooges of capitalism. His American wife, Evelyn Trent, also expressed this view, notably in a bitter attack on the role of the AITUC leadership during the Bombay textile strike of 1924. The organisation, she claimed, 'has never so much as mentioned the Bombay strike, nor sent one of its office-holders to the scene of the struggle to investigate and guide it, nor issued a single appeal on behalf of the starving strikers'.¹¹⁵

Roy's distrust of nationalist leaders went back to his days as a Bengali terrorist and had been fuelled by events which followed the first great mass civil disobedience campaign, launched by Gandhi in August 1920. During the summer of 1921 India was in a state of revolt with widespread strikes and boycotts,¹¹⁶ but this popular upsurge - optimistically hailed by Roy as the birth of a nationalist revolutionary movement¹¹⁷ - was soon to be curtailed. On February 4th, 1922, a violent confrontation between police and demonstrators at Chauri Chaura village¹¹⁸ prompted a shaken Gandhi to demand an immediate end to the non-cooperation campaign. Congress concurred, adopting a resolution for its temporary suspension at an extraordinary session held in Bardoli on the 11th and 12th of February. Roy, who perceived this to be a great betrayal of the militant masses by Gandhi and the other Congress leaders, was scathing in his condemnation; he believed that the Bardoli resolution was a class decision, based on the bourgeoisie's fear of extensive expropriation of land if the masses won power.

¹¹⁴ Communist Papers, op.cit., p.85.

¹¹⁵ E. Roy, 'Some Facts About the Bombay Strike', in Labour Monthly, Vol. 6, No. 5, May 1924, pp.295-6.

¹¹⁶ It was during the summer of 1921 that the Prince of Wales - heir to the British throne - chose to visit India and the Indian people took the opportunity to express their anger to the King's envoy.

¹¹⁷ S. Joshi, Struggle for Hegemony in India 1920-1947, Vol. 1, 1920-1934, Sage Publications Ltd., New Delhi, 1992, p.50.

¹¹⁸ During the incident police fired on demonstrators who retaliated, killing twenty-two policemen.

Rapid Industrialisation

Roy's opposition to collaboration with bourgeois democratic nationalist movements and support of independent Communist action sprang from his conviction that a process of rapid industrialisation was occurring in India. In his book, *India in Transition*, published in 1922, Roy argued that British policy in India since 1916 had been one of encouraging industrial development in order to expand the markets for British goods and 'Since, for the interests of imperial capital, the colonial country has to be industrialised, the native bourgeoisie cannot be any longer excluded altogether from this feast of exploitation'.¹¹⁹ As a result, bourgeois nationalism would compromise with imperialism and the liberation struggle would be left to the political movement of the workers and peasants, led by the Communists.¹²⁰

There was a degree of congruity between this thesis and the views of some British Communists. As early as 1921, Saklatvala was arguing that, faced with the growing strength of British labour after the war, British capitalists had begun a process of limited development of manufacturing output in India. This had encouraged the Indian bourgeoisie to adopt modern industrialism and generated a competitive process which led to a general speeding-up of industrialisation in the country.¹²¹

Rajani Palme Dutt also wrote of the change in British Government policy on Indian economic development which he traced back to the First World War - commencing with the appointment of the Indian Industrial Commission in 1916, whose 1918 report advocated a conscious policy of industrialisation.¹²² Dutt, who claimed to have originated

¹¹⁹ M.N. Roy, 'The Empire and the Revolution', in *Labour Monthly*, Vol. 3, No. 4, October 1922, p.224.

¹²⁰ M.N. Roy, *India in Transition*, Nachiketa Publishers, Bombay, 1971, p.240.

¹²¹ To illustrate his point, he quoted figures showing the number of new companies registered in India between March 1919 and March 1920 as 965, compared to 356 in the twelve months prior to the outbreak of the war in 1914. See Shapurji Saklatvala, 'India in the Labour World', in *Labour Monthly*, Vol. 1, No. 5, November 1921, pp.440-441.

¹²² Rajani Palme Dutt, *Modern India*, CPGB, 1927, pp.52-3.

the rapid industrialisation argument,¹²³ predicted in *Modern India*, that a deteriorating world economic situation would accelerate capital export to India, triggering a rapid industrialisation process.¹²⁴

In common with Roy, Dutt concluded that the industrialisation of India, together with the moderate stance of Congress leaders, was leading to a partnership between British capitalists and the Indian bourgeoisie. The interests of the Indian bourgeoisie, he wrote, 'are already heavily entangled with Imperialism, and this dependence is increasing.'¹²⁵ He agreed that this process would in turn create a large, exploited Indian proletariat which would undercut the living standards of British workers, thus facilitating - or so he asserted - greater working-class solidarity. In this way, the industrial revolution in India would ultimately 'create the means of India's emancipation'.¹²⁶

Dutt's thesis differed from Roy's in that his estimation of the size of the industrial working-class in India - in excess of two million¹²⁷ - was much lower than Roy's.¹²⁸ Dutt also argued, in contrast to Roy, that the industrialisation process was causing tensions between British and Indian capitalists; 'The conception of current capitalist development in India as a national development is a dangerous delusion. On the contrary . . . (Imperialism) is drawing Indian Capitalism more and more into its train'.¹²⁹ By this reasoning, sections of the Indian bourgeoisie did have a role to play in the anti-imperialist struggle. Dutt saw the Congress leadership as representatives of 'petty-bourgeois intellectual elements',¹³⁰ rather than of the big bourgeoisie - another nuance of analysis which distanced him from Roy's version of the argument. Whilst condemning nationalist

¹²³ M. Ahmed, *Myself and the Communist Party of India*, National Book Agency, Calcutta, 1970, pp.479-480.

¹²⁴ He also saw the 1917 Montague-Chelmsford Report, which recommended a policy of limited self-government or dyarchy, as the political counterpart of the rapid industrialisation process and the beginnings of limited power-sharing between British and Indian capitalists.

¹²⁵ Rajani Palme Dutt, 1927, op.cit., p.68.

¹²⁶ Ibid, p.37.

¹²⁷ R.P. Dutt, 1927, op.cit., p.19.

¹²⁸ M.N. Roy, 1971, op.cit., p.54, pp.119-121.

¹²⁹ R.P. Dutt, 1927, op.cit., p.63.

¹³⁰ Ibid., p.81.

leaders for encouraging religious and consequently communal differences,¹³¹ he was prepared to acknowledge Gandhi's achievements, noting that under the Mahatma's leadership, the INC had become a mass movement.¹³²

Thus the CPGB, consistent with Lenin's call for tactical alliances outside the workers' and peasants' movements, continued to pursue a policy of co-operation with colonial nationalists.¹³³

Leading members of the party, moreover, seem to have independently grounded this tactical orientation in a novel analysis of Indian development which owed nothing to the Comintern and which, indeed, brought them into dispute with leading figures within the organisation. These differences underlay the conflict between British Party members and Roy at the Amsterdam Colonial Conference in July 1925 when divisions and uncertainties within the Comintern were exposed;¹³⁴ the rapid industrialization thesis was also a position which they were forced to defend at the 1928 Comintern Congress and one which they only very reluctantly abandoned thereafter.

With the advent of ultra-leftism, the CPGB's analysis came into direct conflict with Comintern policy. The rationalisation of the Comintern's retreat from Lenin's united front strategy fell to the Comintern economist, Eugene Varga,¹³⁵ who claimed that the Indian bourgeoisie, antagonised by Britain's policy of retarding native industry, would attempt to win concessions from the imperialist power by betraying the revolution.¹³⁶ The colonial bourgeoisie were therefore judged to be incapable of leading the anti-imperialist struggle; only the proletariat - in effect, the Communists - could do so.

¹³¹ Given the power of religious and communal traditions in Indian society, the task which Communists faced in transmitting their message was a Herculean one.

¹³² R.P. Dutt, 1927, op.cit., p.72.

¹³³ Roy, in one of a series of mistakes, endorsed the short-lived Swaraj Party, which was formed from the 'progressive' wing of the INC by C.R. Das, believing it to be a potential 'embryonic revolutionary mass party'. See E.H. Carr, op.cit., p.662.

¹³⁴ Communist Papers, op.cit., pp.85-6.

¹³⁵ E. Varga, 'Economic Policy in the Fourth Quarter'. *Inprecorr*, Vol. 8, No. 3, March 1928, pp.285-310.

¹³⁶ Evidence for this process was seen in the Swarajist's support of Dominion status for India and in Gandhi's 'reactionary dreams', (See Jane Degras, Vol. 3, op.cit., p.389), of protecting native industry and use of passive resistance. The Swaraj Party, led by C.R. Das, won substantial support at a special Conference in Delhi in 1923, by opposing Gandhi's passivism. But by April 1927 the Party had returned to the INC fold.

Comintern leaders traduced the position of British Communists on this question in 1928. It was directly equated to the views of Roy - now in disgrace - and both Roy and Dutt were condemned as theorists of 'decolonisation' by Kuusinen at the sixth Congress. Dutt's *Modern India* was specifically cited as a source of the fictional heresy. According to this analysis, Comintern leaders argued, industrialisation would lead to an easing of British rule in India and eventually to self-government - if decolonisation was a reality, then Communists would have to admit that imperialism had played a progressive role in the colonies and this just could not be so.

With the exception of J.T. Murphy, British delegates defended their position. They exposed the weakness of the official line by questioning why the native bourgeoisie would choose to collaborate in the deliberate retardation of their domestic economy and how, in such conditions, it would be possible for the proletariat to develop to the level where it would play a pivotal role in the national liberation struggle. When the vote on Kuusinen's theses was taken, fourteen of the eighteen British delegates refused to support the Comintern line.¹³⁷

The irony was that the anti-imperialist united front now being jettisoned by the Comintern was beginning to show signs of success in India. Calls at the INC's 1927 Madras Congress for full independence, the creation within Congress of the Independence for India League¹³⁸ and Nehru's participation in the 1927 Brussels Congress, all signalled a more radical mood within the Indian nationalist movement. This was consistent with the views of British Communists, who argued that progressive nationalists such as Nehru were moving to the left and these views were further vindicated when Gandhi, at the beginning of 1930, launched the second great campaign of non-co-operation, in the name of complete independence.

¹³⁷ J. Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., p.123.

¹³⁸ The Independence for India League was a pressure group led by Nehru and Subhas Bose.

Conclusion

The newly-formed CPGB faced a number of problems. As a small Party formed from groups outside the mainstream labour movement and affiliated to a body involved in European-wide competition with the Labour and Socialist International and subversion in the colonies, it was certain to arouse the suspicions of Labour leaders. But it also drew criticism from the Communist International. Members were slow to conform to the directives of Lenin, of which they had scant knowledge and understanding; many still clung to the old Radical view of imperialism and failed to appreciate the central role of imperialism in revolutionary strategy. Even so, the party benefitted from the presence in its ranks of anti-colonial activists of the calibre of Rajani Palme Dutt, Shapurji Saklatvala and Clemens Dutt who strove to interpret and explain communist theory and to develop the CPGB's colonial work at home and abroad.

In Britain, the Party's propaganda machine was set in motion, primarily through the pages of Dutt's *Labour Monthly*, but also in *Workers' Weekly*. Communists were able to attack the Labour Government's record on foreign and colonial issues as a continuance of the status quo and to capitalise on the resentment which many colonial activists felt towards an administration in which they had invested their hopes only to be quickly disappointed. In contrast, the CPGB's own uncompromising stance on imperialism was winning friends and gaining influence. During the 1920s Communists came to dominate a number of organisations on the left as they campaigned on issues such as forced labour, land robbery and punitive taxation, which the Labour leadership was not addressing - even though its own Imperial Advisory Committee complained of these practices. While the Comintern's interest in black activists at this time was expressed mainly in broad outline, at least some British Communists were putting forward more specific arguments in relation to Africa and beginning to differentiate between African territories and their specific problems.

On an agitational level, the Party worked to establish links with colonial workers and students in Britain through organisations like the NMM, which was responsible for initiatives like the Oriental Seamen's Union, the British arm of the INC and the WWLI. As the British representative of the AITUC, the WWLI offered an important medium through which to reach the British TUC and promote the campaign for Indian workers' rights but in this, as in other initiatives, the fragile alliance between Communists and non-Communists fractured in the polarised atmosphere after 1928. The CPGB was particularly successful in cultivating links with Indian and Burmese students in Britain - here Indian student organisations such as the Indian Majlis and Fedind were useful - whom they hoped to use as emissaries and cadres for the Communist cause upon their return home.

Divisions existed within the Comintern in relation to many aspects of colonial policy and it must be recognised that the national and colonial theses adopted in the 1920s were, at best, not much more than the first step towards a Marxist analysis of this very complex question. Little wonder that those Communists engaged in this work could not even agree over fundamental issues such as the character of bourgeois nationalist movements, for instance, and the desirability of collaborating with them. Despite being censured for pursuing arguments such as those formulated in Dutt's *Modern India*, the British Party was able to develop its own distinctive line through its experts at a time when the Comintern itself was divided and unsure on this and other issues.

From the mid-1920s, British Communists were able to unite around a resolute and coherent anti-imperialist policy based on Leninist theories which included a practical strategy for their implementation. This gave them a constituency on the British left and also a credence with colonial activists which the Labour Party, burdened with rather nebulous anti-colonialist credentials which were put to the test in office, could not achieve.

In addition, as one arm of a powerful international body headed by a model 'workers' state, the Party was able to establish a network of contacts among colonial nationalists and consequently, an organisational base in the colonies upon which to build. There is no doubt that the work of the Communists prior to the late 1920s was facilitated by the more co-operative atmosphere engendered by the united front strategy. It was from this strategy that one of the most successful Communist anti-imperialist initiatives sprang - the anti-imperialist Brussels Congress of 1927.

CHAPTER TWO: THE LEAGUE AGAINST IMPERIALISM

Background To The Brussels Congress

The Communist International was early alerted to the value of constructing a broad-based international anti-imperialist movement as part of an overall united front strategy. In September 1924, A. Rosenholz proposed to the Secretariat of the Executive Committee of the Comintern, (ECCI), that they form 'an International Union to fight against imperialism, bringing together not only Communist groups of oppressed nationalities but a wider circle, within the auspices of the Comintern.'¹

The reasoning behind this suggestion is clear; by the mid-1920s, unrest had broken out in a number of colonial territories - Morocco, Indonesia, Syria and Nicaragua were all affected - reinforcing the belief that the anti-colonial struggle was gathering momentum. Furthermore, when the 1925 Shanghai strike and trade boycott was brutally suppressed by the colonial authorities, many socialists in the West sympathised with the Chinese workers' cause.

The willingness of British political figures such as the Labour M.P.s George Lansbury, James Maxton, Ellen Wilkinson and A.J. Cook² to identify with the China campaign³ encouraged the Communist movement towards the idea of establishing a united anti-imperialist front, and ultimately gave rise to a major international initiative, the Brussels Congress and its lasting organisational expression, the League Against Imperialism (LAI).

¹ Quoted in Dr. Mustafa Haikel, (University of Leipzig), 'Die Liga gegen Imperialismus und für nationale Unabhängigkeit', Research Paper prepared for a project organised by the IISH in 1992, references from the Russian Centre for the Preservation of and Research into Modern History, Moscow. Dr. Haikel's work was published as: 'The League Against Imperialism and for National Independence, 1927-37', in Jürgen Rojahn (ed.), *The Communist International and its National Sections, 1919-1943*, Peter Lang AG, 1994. A Commission under Bela Kun was subsequently set up to investigate the viability of Rosenholz's scheme but Haikel could not find further information on this.

² A.J. Cook, who resigned from the CPGB in 1921, served as General Secretary of the Miners' Federation from 1924.

³ The highly successful China campaign, initiated by the Workers International Relief, (WIR) - a united front organisation - at the beginning of June 1925, led to the WIR forming its own Colonial Section and extending its work in Africa and Asia.

The idea of staging a Congress in Europe at which colonial nationalists could meet with their Western sympathisers, was mooted by British Communists during a secret meeting held in Amsterdam on the 11th and 12th July, 1925. Delegates, who included M.N. Roy, Evelyn Roy, Henrik Sneevliet and Clemens Dutt, discussed arrangements for an 'Oriental Conference', to which colonial nationalists from India, Egypt, Syria, Palestine and Morocco would be invited. Roy, consistent with his theses to the Second Comintern Congress, argued against such a gathering, labelling it a 'futile' undertaking which would involve 'unreliable elements'⁴ To Roy, these elements included those Indian nationalists whom the CPGB were actively courting at that time. This conference never materialised, but the idea was subsequently carried through by Willi Munzenberg,⁵ General Secretary of the Workers' International Relief, (WIR), reaching fruition in February 1927.

The first official steps towards organising an international anti-imperialist conference were taken at a meeting convened on February 10th, 1926, in the Town Hall, Berlin.⁶ During these proceedings a League Against Colonial Oppression, LACO,⁷ was formed, its stated purpose being to organise a conference to 'bring together all elements willing to strike effectively against colonial atrocities and oppression.'⁸ It was originally intended to

⁴ Communist Papers, op.cit., p.86.

⁵ Munzenberg was fast emerging as one of the Comintern's chief propagandists. For details of his life and works see: Babette Gross, Willi Munzenberg: a political biography, Michigan State University Press, Michigan, 1974; R.N. Carew Hunt, 'Willi Munzenberg', in D. Footman (ed.), St. Anthony's Papers, No.IX, International Communism, Chatto and Windus, London, 1960; H. Gruber, 'Willi Munzenberg: chief propagandist for and against the Comintern', in International Revolutionary Socialist History, No. 10, Part 2, 1965; M. Haikel, op.cit., pp.12-13.

⁶ The meeting was convened on the joint initiative of the WIR and the Committee Against Atrocities in Syria - a communist organisation engaged in agitation against the French authorities. Otto Lehmann-Russbuldt of the German League for Civil Rights (GLCR) chaired the assembly; those present included Gibarti, representing the WIR; Dr. Klauber of the Socialist Doctors; Mohammed Pour Reza, Socialist Party of Persia; Marmulla, League of ex-combatants; Winter, GLCR; Munzenberg and a representative from Camaroon.

⁷ Also referred to as the League Against Colonialism and the League Against Colonial Atrocities and Oppression. Evidence of pre-planning was revealed in Munzenberg's announcement that the initiating organisation of the LACO had already made the first moves towards convening the international conference.

⁸ The LACO's inauguration was announced in Inprecorr, the Comintern's International Press Correspondence, on 3rd August 1926, together with Munzenberg's proposal for an International Congress of Oppressed Peoples. An LACO newsheet, The Struggle for Colonial Freedom - first published on 5th July 1926 - proceeded to offer 'honorary membership' cards. See International Information, Vol.IV, No.51, 7-

stage the event in Berlin, where Munzenberg's headquarters were situated, but the German Government refused permission following pressure from Britain.⁹ Brussels was eventually secured as the venue after the Hungarian communist Louis Gibarti travelled to Belgium to negotiate terms.¹⁰

Soviet Russia's initial reaction to the plan was one of scepticism. Many leading members of the CPSU, fearing ideological confusion, shared M.N. Roy's disapproval of Munzenberg's methods of recruiting broad-based support for Communist causes. G. Voitinski, deputy head of the Comintern's Eastern Secretariat, warned a meeting of the Eastern Committee of the ECCI in March 1926, that such a conference could be used by the Social Democrats against the Comintern and the Soviet Union.¹¹ But these doubts lost credence as leading political and intellectual figures responded to the Conference invitations¹² and, in the event, the general response to the Congress went far beyond the expectations of its organisers.

One of the most valued participants was Jawaharlal Nehru, then General Secretary of the Indian National Congress (INC). Nehru, who in March 1926 accompanied his sick wife, Kamala, on an extended trip to Europe for medical treatment, was informed of the proposed Conference whilst in Berlin. He immediately realised its potential both as a vehicle for INC propaganda and as a means of 'getting into touch with other countries and peoples so that we may be able to understand their viewpoint and world politics generally.'¹³ His call for Congress to participate met with an enthusiastic response and he

10-27, p.416, published by the Secretariat of the Labour and Socialist International, Zurich, ID/CI/36/7i, (LPA).

⁹ George Padmore, *op.cit.*, p.322. During the period of the Weimar Republic the city played host to a large number of colonial activists, many of whom had established contact with the LACO.

¹⁰ Babette Gross, *op.cit.*, p.185. Agreement was reached following Gibarti's assurance that the situation in the Belgian Congo would not be discussed and that a list of delegates would be submitted to the Belgian Surete for approval. It was significant that the recently appointed Belgian Foreign Minister, Emile Vandervelde, was also secretary of the Second International - a decision to ban a congress against imperialism would have undoubtedly reflected badly upon that organisation and its leaders.

¹¹ M. Haikel, *op.cit.*, p.19.

¹² From early 1926, the WIR's Colonial Committee sent out hundreds of invitations throughout the world.

¹³ Dorothy Norman (ed.), *Nehru: the First Sixty Years*, The Bodley Head, London, 1965, p.128.

was duly appointed as the official INC representative to the Brussels Congress - the first occasion that Congress had sent a delegate to any international body.¹⁴

The Comintern was delighted with this development; an ECCI document entitled 'Instructions for Delegates to the Brussels Congress', had stressed the need to establish political relations between national revolutionary parties, especially 'the Indian, Egyptian and other British colonial delegates'.¹⁵ As a seal of approval on the Conference plan, Moscow despatched Marcel Rosenberg, a Russian Foreign Office official, to Berlin with orders to advise Conference organisers on the political character of the groups and individuals involved.¹⁶

The Brussels Congress

British Communists - and Shapurji Saklatvala in particular - played an important role in organising the Brussels Congress.¹⁷ Invitations were issued from Berlin in December 1926 by a Provisional Congress Committee¹⁸ which included Saklatvala, who had been prevented by the Egyptian Government from visiting that country in order to publicise the event, a decision which led to protests in the Egyptian Parliament.¹⁹ The appointment of the British delegation - one of the largest with eighteen members - was organised by Helen Crawford, a leading CPGB member and secretary of the British Bureau of the WIR, and Reginald Bridgeman, a non-Communist, ex-professional diplomat of aristocratic background.²⁰

¹⁴ In May 1927, the All-India Congress Committee passed a resolution which recommended affiliation with the LAI, the organisation which was officially formed at the Brussels Congress. See The Anti-Imperialist Review, Vol.1, No.1, July 1928, in the Reginald Bridgeman Papers (henceforth RBP), Brynmor Jones Library, Hull University.

¹⁵ M. Haikel, op.cit., p.29.

¹⁶ Babette Gross, op.cit., p.185. A number of pre-Congress meetings were held with delegates from India, South Africa and Indonesia, to ascertain and focus their views.

¹⁷ M. Haikel, op.cit., p.24, n.5.

¹⁸ Opening of the Brussels Congress, 1927, LAI (1-50), International Institute for Social History (henceforth IISH), Amsterdam. The Committee also included George Lansbury, Roger Baldwin, Mrs. Sun Yat Sen, Nehru and Munzenberg, with Louis Gibarti as the contact name.

¹⁹ M. Haikel, op.cit., p.25.

²⁰ Reginald Francis Orlando Bridgeman, a career diplomat, was acting Charge d'Affaires at the British Embassy in Tehran during 1921, but was subsequently compulsorily retired from the service because of his anti-imperialist views. See The Foreign Office List and Diplomatic and Consular Year Book for 1924

The delegation was first discussed at a meeting held in the House of Commons on 2nd. December, 1926, attended by the Labour M.P.s George Lansbury; R.C. Wallhead; J. Compton; J.J. Tinker; Ernest Thurtle and Ellen Wilkinson. Also present were Colonel L'Estrange Malone, a future Labour M.P. for Northampton; Ben Tillett of the Transport and General Workers Union and member of the TUC General Council; W.N. Ewer, the *Daily Herald's* foreign editor; Bridgeman; Saklatvala and Ralph Fox, a Communist writer who later died fighting in the Spanish Civil War. A circular was subsequently issued by Bridgeman on 4th. February 1927, announcing that the Belgian Government had given authorisation for the Congress to be held in Brussels.²¹

A special Congress Secretariat was temporarily established at the Hotel du Globe, Place Royale, Brussels, and Georges Gerard, secretary of the Belgian Section of the LACO, was appointed acting secretary. The first full session opened at 4pm on Thursday, February 10th 1927, and proceedings continued until the 15th, during which time delegates discussed issues as listed on the Agenda.²² Despite the difficulties involved in assembling such a gathering - many delegates were forced to travel illegally to the Congress - attendance was high, with an impressive number of eminent intellectuals and literary figures offering their support both to the Congress and to the LAI. The official list of officers elected and delegates in attendance is recorded in the 'Official Protocol of the Congress Against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism, the Signal Flame at the Palais Egmont, Berlin, 1927', and is reproduced in Appendix Two of this thesis.

Full prominence was given to high-status participants - the opening address was delivered by the distinguished French writer Henri Barbusse and honorary members of the

pp.153-4, ID/CI/36/1, (LPA).; J. Bellamy and J. Saville, *National Dictionary of Labour Biography*, Vol. 7, Macmillan, 1984, p.41.

²¹ R. Bridgeman, Circular Letter, 4-2-27, (RBP).

²² These included Imperialism and its consequences in the colonies; Imperialism and the dangers of war; co-operation between and co-ordination of national liberation movements and metropolitan labour; the establishment of a permanent global anti-imperialist organisation.

Presidium included his contemporary, Romain Rolland; American novelist Upton Sinclair; Russian novelist Maxim Gorki and Albert Einstein.²³ Further messages of support were received from Victor Margueritte, Mahatma Gandhi and Clara Zetkin, president of International Red Aid, (MOPR).²⁴

George Lansbury, the vice-president and respected 'elder statesman' of the British Labour Party whose address urged those struggling for liberation in Africa and Asia to follow Socialism before nationalism, was a particularly welcome ally.²⁵ Lansbury's support, together with that of Edo Fimmen - Dutch founder of the International Federation of Transport Workers and former Secretary of the moderate International Federation of Trade Unions - helped to form the proceedings into a politically heterogeneous affair.

The most influential group at the Congress was provided by the Chinese.²⁶ The situation in China was the focus of Soviet hopes ²⁷ and a prominent issue in Comintern deliberations at this time and this was reflected in Congress debates, with British delegates speaking mainly on the progress of the 1925-27 Nationalist Revolution. Given the importance of both China and India to the anti-imperialist struggle, great significance was given to the signing during the Congress of a Sino-Indian declaration of solidarity drafted by Nehru,²⁸ which marked the beginning of a period of close relations between the two nations.

²³ Einstein did not attend the Congress, but sent a letter of encouragement.

²⁴ Rolf Italiaander, Schwarze Haute im Roten Griff, Dusseldorf, 1962, p.32. MOPR was established by the Comintern in 1922 to aid victims of the class struggle.

²⁵ For details of Lansbury's address see Opening of the Brussels Congress, op.cit. He was unable to attend the Brussels proceedings in person because of work commitments.

²⁶ It was claimed in some quarters that the Kuomintang (KMT), was largely responsible for financing the event, (See Letter, William Gillies to Walter Citrine, 28-8-29, (LPA), although support also came from President Calles' National Peoples' Government of Mexico. The Mexican revolution, which began with Alvaro Obregon's government in 1917, collided with vested interests when the government of Plutarco Calles attempted to implement article 27 of the constitution and restore the land to the peasants. This was opposed by landowners, the church and US oil magnates. See New Leader, 14-2-27.

²⁷ 'The United Front in the Struggle for Emancipation of the Oppressed Nations', Resolution, Brussels Congress, p.2, (IISH).

²⁸ S. Gopal, Jawaharlal Nehru - a biography, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1989, p.54.

Although African affairs did not feature prominently during the Congress, this was a time when the Comintern, aware of the decline of early Pan-Africanism²⁹ and the black nationalist ideas of Marcus Garvey, was attempting to recruit negro groups³⁰ and several of the delegates were either African or of African descent. These included Lamine Senghor, the French West African who represented the *Comite de la defense de la race negre* (CDRN)³¹ and who was elected during the Congress to serve on both the Executive Committee and the Bureau of the League. Senghor, who was accompanied to the Congress by Narcisse Danae, Max Bloncourt and other members of the CDRN,³² made an impact upon the proceedings by launching a scathing attack on French colonialism.³³ During the Congress, he chaired a Commission³⁴ which compiled a resolution on the Negro Question calling for the liberation of the Negro race, which was presented to the Plenary Session on the Negro Question by the Afro-American, R.B. Moore.³⁵

As Nehru had recognised, one of the most important functions of the Conference was that it presented a unique opportunity for colonial activists to meet together and to experience wider influences, particularly during the many informal meetings which preceeded the Conference proper. For example, the South Africans I.A. La Guma and J.T. Gumede accepted an invitation to visit the U.S.S.R. during the autumn of 1927, as did Nehru.³⁶

²⁹ A number of Pan-African Congresses were convened during the early decades of the century; these were held in Paris in 1919, in London and Brussels during 1921, in Lisbon and London during 1923 and in New York in 1927. Largely the initiative of the Afro-American writer and campaigner, W.E. Bois, working in collaboration with the National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples, the early gatherings tended to be politically moderate events, essentially concerned with creating a sense of positive identity. The 1923 manifesto for example, included the request, 'we ask in all the world, that black folk be treated as men', (Quoted in Colin Legum, *Pan-Africanism, a short political guide*, Greenwood Press, Connecticut, 1976, p.29.) - aspirations to self-determination were as yet largely unkindled.

³⁰ Primarily through the auspices of Munzenberg.

³¹ Senghor was president of the CDRN,

³² See J.A. Langley, 'Pan-Africanism in Paris 1924-1936', in the *Journal of Modern African Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 1, 1969, pp.78-81. The CDRN, which was formed in March 1926 by Senghor, a member of the French CP since 1923, was regarded as pro-communist by the French authorities.

³³ Senghor's address is quoted in *Ibid*, p.82.

³⁴ Other participants included R.B. Moore; Martins; Bloncourt and J.T. Gumede, representing the African National Congress.

³⁵ In addition to members of the Commission, the Session was attended by Hafiz Bey Ramadan, who took the chair, and the Senegalese Deputy to the French Assembly, Blaise Diagne, who appeared under a pseudonym. See Imanuel Geiss, *The Pan-African Movement*, Methuen and Co. Ltd., London, 1974, p.329.

³⁶ In November 1927 Nehru, accompanied by his father Motilal, visited the Soviet Union where he met Roy for the first time, and appeared to have been 'considerably impressed by the social experiments that

They and E. A. Richards, otherwise known as I.T.A. Wallace Johnson, chair of the Sierra Leone Railway Workers' Union, toured the Soviet Union and attended the tenth anniversary celebrations of the Bolshevik Revolution, an experience which impressed them deeply.³⁷

A recognition of pluralism and spirit of tolerance, implicit in the Resolution on the United Front in the Struggle for the Emancipation of the Oppressed Nations,³⁸ ensured that the Congress proceedings ran smoothly. Such sensitivity was also behind the low profile Communist presence. The delegates themselves generally reacted with enthusiasm to the event; Nehru³⁹ for example, pronounced it 'A milestone in Indian foreign relations',⁴⁰ and the editorial of *New Leader* for 18th February, 1927, echoed this favourable reaction.⁴¹ Even the Comintern, although unable to exercise total control, was satisfied,⁴² while the general consensus of opinion among friend and foe alike was that the initiative had been a great success.

Buoyed by such optimism the LAI, which pledged to fight 'for the political and social emancipation of all peoples', began with high hopes.⁴³ According to a foreword by James Maxton⁴⁴ in the July 1928 edition of the *Anti-Imperialist Review*,⁴⁵ the League 'has

were being carried out there.' See L.P. Singha, 'Marxism and Nehru's Concept of Socialism', in *Political Science Review*, Vol. 12, Part 314, 1973, p.213.

³⁷ E.T. Wilson, op.cit., p.153.

³⁸ 'The United Front in the Struggle for the Emancipation of the Oppressed Nations', Resolution, Brussels Congress, 1927, (IISH).

³⁹ During the Congress, Nehru mingled with Marxists such as Virendranath Chattopadhyaya and 'on his return . . . Loudly applauded the achievements of the Soviet Union'. See L.P. Singha, op.cit.

⁴⁰ Quoted in M. Haikel, op.cit., p.32.

⁴¹ Editorial Comment, *New Leader*, 18th February, 1927, described a 'very remarkable conference', which could influence nationalist movements to be concerned with economic liberty as well as political liberty and 'to incorporate their nationalism within a wider Internationalism'. The event also led European Socialists to 'see capitalism as a closely knit world tyranny'.

⁴² The Resolution on Imperialism passed by the Congress followed Leninist theory in describing imperialism as; 'not an accidental phenomenon from which capitalism can rid itself of its own volition, it is the logical sequence of historical development.' Resolution on Imperialism, Brussels Congress 10th.-14th. February 1927, LAI (51-101), (IISH).

⁴³ Statutes of the League Against Imperialism and for National Independence, n.d., c1928, ID/CI/36/9, (LPA).

⁴⁴ Maxton was chair of the ILP and editor of that organisation's newsheet, *New Leader*.

⁴⁵ A single issue of the *Anti-Imperialist Review*, journal of the LAI, was issued in 1928; publication resumed in September 1931.

established contact with every part of the world and is amassing exact information about the conditions of the workers everywhere'.⁴⁶ This was an extravagant claim, but in the months immediately following the Brussels Congress, the anti-imperialist struggle was certainly given a new organisational impetus.

Even as the success of the Congress was being celebrated, however, the attitudes of the Communist leadership were hardening into the sectarian policies of the Third Period. The implementation of Stalin's hardline 'class against class' policy at the Sixth Comintern Congress in 1928 was the result of a combination of factors; notably the Communist's growing belief in the radicalisation of the masses and an increasing hostility towards the Communist movement from leaders of the Second International. In Britain both these developments were thought to have accelerated after the 1926 General Strike.⁴⁷ But it was the split between Chinese nationalist forces and Communists in April 1927,⁴⁸ which highlighted for the Comintern the dangers inherent in united front policies.⁴⁹

From the time of the League Against Imperialism's inaugural General Assembly, held in Brussels on 9th-11th December 1927, the Communists stepped up their attacks on the social democrats⁵⁰ - whose theory of the gradual road to self-determination was described as 'a direct aid to imperialism'⁵¹ - and the colonial national bourgeoisie. Significantly, the defence of the Soviet Union⁵² was given greater priority in League business; it was

⁴⁶ *Anti-Imperialist Review*, op.cit.

⁴⁷ John Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., pp.113-114.

⁴⁸ During the 1925-7 Chinese Revolution, Chinese communists joined forces with the nationalist Kuomintang led by Chiang Kai Shek in a classic united front operation, but on 12th April 1927, Chiang turned on his erstwhile allies, massacring the Communist fractions.

⁴⁹ In December 1927, the League condemned the KMT's betrayal of the anti-imperialist struggle, and warned that a similar betrayal was to be expected in other colonial countries, citing the Indian landowners and 'big bourgeoisie' as elements ready to compromise with imperialism in return for concessions. See Resolutions of the General Council of the LAI, December 1927, Resolution on China, LAI 51-101, (IISH); Resolutions of the General council of the LAI, December 1927, Political Resolution, op.cit.

⁵⁰ The League's General Council denounced the Simon Commission, established in Britain in 1927 to examine avenues towards Indian self-government, as an 'impudent farce' and attacked the Labour Party's support of it. See Resolutions of the General Council of the LAI, December 1927, Resolution on India, op.cit.

⁵¹ Resolutions of the General Council of the LAI, December 1927, Political Resolution, op.cit.

⁵² The Soviet Union had proposed total disarmament at the Geneva Disarmament Conference.

maintained that since the Brussels Congress, increasingly aggressive imperialist policies had been implemented and the danger of war through inter-imperialist rivalry was increasing.

Communist Front

Hostility to the Brussels Congress and the LAI sprang from two main sources - the colonial governments, which banned League literature and colluded to restrict the movements of those involved in League activities,⁵³ and the Labour and Socialist International (LSI). The LSI's opposition to the League was predicated on the belief that it was a Communist front organisation whose ultimate aim was to discredit the Second International whilst promoting the spread of Communist ideology throughout the colonies.⁵⁴ The motives and independence of many of the Brussels delegates were also called into question by the Socialist body, which queried the accuracy of the official Congress minutes.⁵⁵ After some deliberation, the LSI concluded that 'the fact that the initiative for the Brussels Congress and for the foundation of the League derives from the Communists permits no doubt whatever'.⁵⁶

One of the most immediate ramifications of the LSI's stance was that George Lansbury, who was in line to become chair of the British Labour Party, resigned his position as chair of the International LAI in June 1927, as it became clear that the two posts were incompatible. Fenner Brockway, a leading ILP member, took over the post at a meeting of the League held in Cologne on August 19th and 20th.⁵⁷ But he was obliged to follow Lansbury's example after a decision of the LSI's Executive on the 2nd September, which

⁵³ See Jean Jones, The League Against Imperialism, Occasional Papers Series No. 4, The Socialist History Society, 1996, pp.8-9.

⁵⁴ The LSI accused the League of being 'intent on subordinating the interests of oppressed peoples and of nationalist movements to the political interests of an unnamed power' - the Soviet Union. International Information, op.cit., p.424.

⁵⁵ Jean Jones, 1996, op.cit.

⁵⁶ See Report of E.C. meeting of the LSI, September 1927, ID/CI/36/5i, Supplementary Notes, (LPA)

⁵⁷ Letter, Friedrich Adler to Fenner Brockway, 13-4-27, ID/CI/36/5iv, (LPA).

passed a resolution stating that 'it cannot be any part of the tasks of the LSI or of parties affiliated thereto, to join the so-called League Against Colonial Oppression'.⁵⁸

There is no doubt that the Comintern was determined that the Brussels Congress and the LAI should not fall under the sway of its rivals in the Second International. In its 'Instructions for Delegates to the Brussels Congress', the ECCI's Political Secretariat admitted that 'the purpose of the (Communist) delegation is to gain control of the Congress'⁵⁹ and three months later, Munzenberg wrote, 'Every effort must be made to bring communist sympathisers, men and women, into the League'.⁶⁰ The Comintern hierarchy was prepared to countenance a limited degree of co-operation with social democrats in the belief that their involvement would encourage the participation of those who would otherwise shun an all-Communist body. Figures from the British labour movement were particularly useful in this battle for hearts and minds.⁶¹ But it was an uneasy alliance, based on mutual suspicion and fear.

Despite the machinations of the Comintern and the disparagement of the LSI, the principles upon which the Brussels Congress was founded - of freedom, equality and international brotherhood - proved stronger than the political manoeuvring. The Communist initiative was unprecedented and responded to a need which no other political movement, and in particular the LSI, had attempted to address.⁶² Delegates met together, exchanging ideas, cementing alliances, pledging mutual support and, in so doing, ensured that the initiative was a remarkable success. However, the LAI, conceived as a great

⁵⁸ International Information, op.cit., p.424.

⁵⁹ M. Haikel, op.cit., p.28.

⁶⁰ Ibid., p.35.

⁶¹ Ibid. Following the formation of the British section of the League, Munzenberg was able to claim that, 'Our great advantage is that we can exploit the fact that the League has been established in England and that Lansbury and Fenner Brockway are spearheading it against the Second International, which constantly denounces us as a Communist sham.'

⁶² The words of Einstein encapsulated the spirit which the Congress briefly awakened: 'I wish success to your noble endeavour', he wrote, 'and I am convinced that the success of the work which you have undertaken will be of great benefit to everyone who has at heart a sense of human dignity'. Quoted in Opening of the Brussels Congress, op.cit., (IISH)

mass movement against imperialism and for Socialism, was unable to sustain this goodwill for more than a brief period of its existence.

The Second World Congress

An Executive Committee meeting of the League held in Cologne on the 15/16th January, 1929, where the Russians led by Melnichansky⁶³ played an active role for the first time, marked the point at which the League was brought fully into line with the Comintern's new hard-line policy.⁶⁴ In the wake of Brockway's resignation, James Maxton had been elected chair of the International League at the first session of the General Council held in Brussels on December 8th, 1927.⁶⁵ But by February, 1929, Communists and their sympathisers were taking control of the E.C..⁶⁶

The impact of the new Comintern line was evident from the structuring of the Second World Congress of the LAI, which opened in Frankfurt-am-Main on July 21st, 1929.⁶⁷ While the official Congress report gives the number of delegates present as 263;⁶⁸ these being representatives of trade unions, nationalist organisations and the League's national sections,⁶⁹ J.R. Hooker maintains that of the delegates present, only 84 were genuine

⁶³ A leading member of the Central Council of the All-Russian Federation of Trade Unions.

⁶⁴ E.T. Wilson, *op.cit.*, p.170. During 1929, the Comintern moved its headquarters from Moscow to Berlin, the latter being more accessible to foreign activists and geographically removed from Soviet responsibility.

⁶⁵ Anti-Imperialist Review, *op.cit.*

⁶⁶ Munzenberg had replaced Gibarti as general secretary and the Indian communist Chattopadhyaya was joint secretary. Other appointees were; Mme Duchesne, Saklatvala, Nehru, Melnichanski, Dr. A. Marteaux, Reginald Bridgeman, the American Roger Baldwin, Mohammed Hatta, Mustapha Chedli and the Mexican artist, Diego Rivera. See Invitation to the Second World Congress of the LAI, 20th-31st July, 1929, ID/CI/36/19, (LPA); Agenda of the Second World Congress of the LAI, Paris (original venue), 20th-31st July, 1929, (IISH).

⁶⁷ The Second Congress was originally intended to meet in Paris. Labour Monthly, Vol.11, No.7, July 1929, p.420 see also Invitation to the Second World Congress, *op.cit.*

⁶⁸ Among the British delegation was Sam Elsbury, leader of the short-lived United Clothing Workers Union and a CPGB member until his expulsion in late 1929; Len Bradley, brother of the CPGB activist, Ben Bradley, who was imprisoned that same year for his role in helping to establish trade unions in India and A.J. Cook - a founder member of the CPGB who resigned in 1921, but remained active in the National Minority Movement.

⁶⁹ The list of affiliated organisations in 1929 were given as: INC; AITUC; Independence for India League; a total of sixteen trade unions in India; Sarekat Karem Boeroeh Indonesia; Egyptian National Party; ANC; Railwaymen's Union, Sierra Leone; twenty trade unions in Mexico; IRA, Ireland; Sinn Fein and LAI sections in Mexico, the Philippines, South Africa, San Salvadore, Nicaragua, Cuba, Ecuador, Porto Rico, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil, France, Holland, Germany, USA. Sympathising organisations were listed as:

colonial representatives and of these only 15 had travelled directly from the colonies.⁷⁰ The Congress, a carefully controlled affair offering little opportunity for spontaneity, opened to the symbolic presentation of a blood-stained flag by General Sandino⁷¹ of Nicaragua,⁷² a reflection of the growing awareness of the USA's imperial ambitions in this area.⁷³

In an attempt to commit delegates to a line sympathetic to the foreign policy of the Soviet Union, a manifesto was drawn up which undermined many of the aims formulated at the Brussels Congress.⁷⁴ The Frankfurt manifesto referred to an 'imminent imperialist war . . . for the monopolist right to rob' colonies,' while stressing that 'the chief danger is the danger of war against the Soviet Union'.⁷⁵ It was stressed that in the 'decisive world conflict between imperialism on the one hand and the Soviet Union on the other',⁷⁶ the League had to support the latter. The Soviet Union was held to be both a model and a stimulus for the colonial peoples - the reason, according to Communists, for the imperialists' war preparations against her.

The manifesto launched a scathing attack on Social Democracy,⁷⁷ the prelude to an orchestrated campaign to rid the League of its non-Communist members to which

the Arabian National Congress (Palestine), Wafd Party, South African TUC, Gold Coast Farmers' Association, Pan-African Congress (USA), NAACP, Universal Negro Improvement Association.

⁷⁰ J.R. Hooker, op.cit., p.13.

⁷¹ General Augusto Caesar Sandino, a member of the International Executive Committee of the LAI, was subsequently accused of collaborating with US imperialism, but was cleared of the accusations by August 1930.

⁷² B. Gross, op.cit., p.195.

⁷³ By June 1929, League sections had been established in a number of South American countries including Mexico, Argentina, Nicaragua, Brazil and Cuba. In recognition of American imperialism, an important position was afforded to the Philippines' delegation - Reginald Bridgeman claimed that the Philippines' Confederation of Peasants was the most important group at the Congress because that country represented the 'spearhead of US interests in the Orient'. See Labour Monthly, July 1929, op.cit., p.423.

⁷⁴ The International Anti-Militaristic Commission, IAC, which sent delegates to the Frankfurt Congress, reported that 'as a result of the attempts of the official communists to make the League subservient to the Third International, our delegates had a very difficult task.' IAC Press Service Report, No. 39, 28th. March, 1930, p.2, Sylvia Pankhurst Papers, (IISH). The Commission, which was founded in the late 1920s and based in the Hague, was clearly inspired by Gandhi's methods.

⁷⁵ Manifesto of the Second World Congress of the LAI, 1929, p.2, (IISH).

⁷⁶ M. Haikel, op.cit., p.42.

⁷⁷ In its Resolution on the Trade Unions and the Struggle Against Imperialism, the League pledged co-operation only with those who went beyond 'lip service' - the League regarded the trade unions in the

Maxton, who presided over the second World Congress, succumbed in September 1929. Maxton was obliged to listen with discomfort as speaker after speaker attacked the colonial policies of the British Labour Government and its 'apologists' within the ILP leadership.⁷⁸ At the time of the Frankfurt Congress, Labour was again in power and winning approval for its foreign and colonial policies from Conservative opponents and their allies in the press.⁷⁹ Critics included Harry Pollitt and Saklatvala, who described the ILP as 'the left outpost of the Labour Party against the revolutionary workers in Britain and the colonial masses in the British Empire'.⁸⁰

Those sections of the colonial nationalist movement which failed 'to join wholeheartedly with the revolutionary movement of the masses'⁸¹ also came under attack from Communists. The Declaration of the Second World Congress included a diatribe against the Nanking government for alleged anti-Soviet acts such as the 'seizure' of the Chinese Eastern Railway and criticism of the INC's preparations for a non-cooperation campaign by Harry Pollitt, who described it as a waste of opportunities and of lives.⁸²

By 1931, many of the prominent figures whose support had been warmly welcomed in Brussels and who had substantiated the LAI's claim to be open to all individuals and organisations supporting the anti-imperialist struggle, had either resigned or been expelled. Chattopadhyaya wrote to Nehru at the end of 1929, condemning his signing of the Delhi Manifesto, which declared support for Dominion status, and accusing him of a 'betrayal of the Indian masses'.⁸³

capitalist countries from this point of view -and engaged in a real fight against colonialism. Resolution on the Trade Unions and the Struggle Against Imperialism, Second World Congress of the LAI, Frankfurt, 1929, (IISH).

⁷⁸ A hard-line resolution on the issue was proposed by Melnichansky, who denounced Labour's record in India.

⁷⁹ The Times, 29-8-29; Letter from Sir Michael O'Dwyer (a former prominent Indian civil servant of autocratic, right-wing persuasion), to The Times, 11-6-28.

⁸⁰ The Sunday Worker, 28-7-29.

⁸¹ Manifesto of the Second World Congress of the LAI, op.cit., pp.2-3.

⁸² Declaration of the Second World Congress of the LAI, 21-7-1929, p.3, (IISH).

⁸³ J. Nehru, A Bunch of Old Letters, Oxford University Press, New Delhi, 1988, p.81; Dorothy Norman, op.cit., p.152.

Nehru was furious at this insult, his relationship with the LAI deteriorated and in April 1930, in his capacity as President of the INC, he directed Congress to cease all correspondence with the League. However, the Communists, concerned at the danger of 'a faction of certain elements' forming against the League, held their decision to expel the Indian leader in abeyance until the following year.⁸⁴ Others who found it impossible to work within the organisation under the new discipline included Roger Baldwin, Director of the American Civil Liberties Union, who was expelled in Spring 1931 for his support of the INC,⁸⁵ Edo Fimmen and Mohammed Hatta, who resigned from the League.

There was a price to pay for the Communist monopoly; as the League lost its broad-based support and became increasingly sectarian, so it forfeited much of its integrity and influence. Most of the leading figures whose involvement had raised the League above other, less enlightened political organisations had withdrawn their support, leaving it vulnerable to attack from all quarters. Nevertheless, at the time of the Second Congress, the League's message was still being spread among colonial activists, particularly among Africans and peoples of African descent.

The Comintern and Black Liberation

The Sixth Comintern Congress, held in July 1928, had accepted the thesis put forward by Dr. Otto Kuusinen which called for American negroes to be recognised as a national, as opposed to a racial, minority and to be allocated their own autonomous state.⁸⁶ It was hoped that the generation of a 'black belt' nationalism⁸⁷ would boost CP support among

⁸⁴ Minutes of a Meeting of the CPGB's Political Bureau, 15-5-30, Reel 11, (CPA).

⁸⁵ J. Nehru, *op.cit.*, p.99.

⁸⁶ This was in line with the Stalinist theory on national minorities and echoed Lenin's reference to black Americans as a subject nation in his Draft Theses on the National and Colonial Question, put to the Second Comintern Congress in 1920. The issue had been discussed at the Fifth Congress, but was not pursued, probably in deference to opposition from the CPUSA - Lovett Fort-Whiteman, the only black delegate at the Fifth Congress, apparently opposed the idea. See H. Heywood, *op.cit.*, pp.218-244.

⁸⁷ This strategy was also applied to South Africa, where there was an established Communist Party, through the proposal for an independent Native South African Republic. A similar scheme, drawn up during discussions held in Moscow in 1927, had been rejected by the CPSA in favour of a Workers' and Peasants' Republic (See H. Heywood, *op.cit.*, p.237) but, after 1928, objectors were dismissed as 'individual right-

Afro-Americans,⁸⁸ by combining Communism with nationalist aspirations already kindled by pan-Africanist ideas such as those propagated by Marcus Garvey's Universal Negro Improvement Association, which spearheaded the once-popular 'Back to Africa' movement.⁸⁹

Interest in the African colonies arose from the belief that they were helping to sustain capitalism in its time of crisis - as financial markets collapsed following the Wall Street Crash and the system itself appeared to be on the brink of disaster. Confidence in the African peoples' ability to rise against their oppressors was based on the analysis that an increasing rate of imperialist exploitation in Africa since the first World War required an African proletariat, a class which had hitherto barely existed. Communists argued that, in order to create a ready supply of wage labour, the imperial powers were imposing poll and hut taxes to force people to work within the capitalist system. This was sowing the seeds of dissent in Africa, with signs that revolt was spreading throughout the sub-continent.⁹⁰

In recognition of the importance now ascribed to the question of black liberation, the Eastern Secretariat of the Comintern established a Negro Bureau in 1928. Among its members were William Patterson, Earl Browder, James Ford and Harry Heywood.⁹¹ At a meeting of the Bureau held in the summer 1930, a resolution was passed which endorsed the policy of blacks as an oppressed national minority,⁹² but the scheme was ill-conceived

wing opportunists'. See G. Safarov, 'The World Economic Crisis and the Development of Revolutionary Ferment in the Colonies', in The Communist International, Vol. 6, No. 31, 15-2-30, p.1235.

⁸⁸ Afro-American communists Harry Heywood, James Ford and William Patterson held talks with Bukharin, Kuusinen, Dmitri Manuilsky and others to urge that more emphasis be put on the role of black Americans in the colonial struggle. See W. Patterson, op.cit., p.110.

⁸⁹ Communists originally regarded Garvey's organisation as a potentially important ally.

⁹⁰ Reel 1, Minutes of a Central Committee Meeting, 11/12-1-1930, (CPA).

⁹¹ Other members included Bill Dunne, William Weinstone, Mingulian - head of the Anglo-American Secretariat, Mikhailov - Comintern representative to the CPUSA, Nasanov and several students from KUTV and the Lenin School. See H. Heywood, op.cit., pp.331-2.

⁹² Ibid.

and rapidly proved to be both unworkable and damaging, exposing Communists to accusations of promoting a form of apartheid.⁹³

At the time of the Frankfurt Congress, concerted efforts were being made to recruit black activists. In its Resolution on the Negro Question, which included demands for equality, manumission, and workers' rights, the League declared that 'all theories of superior and inferior races are lies calculated to deceive the masses'.⁹⁴ This followed an earlier 'Memo on Forced Labour' to the International Labour Organisation, issued by Munzenberg, Chattopadhyaya and Emile Burns, which attacked the use of forced labour by private firms engaged in public works programmes.⁹⁵

Communists were now emphasising evidence of reformism among black nationalists. During a special Congress session held on July 26th, 1929,⁹⁶ the Afro-American delegate, J.W. Ford,⁹⁷ launched a scathing attack on those bourgeois-reformist elements with whom the Communist movement was competing for the allegiance of black and coloured workers. These included the American-based, integrationist, National Association for the Advancement of Colored Peoples (NAACP), the moderate pan-Africanism of Dr. Du

⁹³ G. Padmore, *op.cit.*, p.306.

⁹⁴ Resolution on the Negro Question, Second World Congress of the LAI, Frankfurt, 1929, p.3, (IISH).

⁹⁵ This memo. gave the example of Griffiths and Co., who in 1925 were given the contract to build a railway into Uganda with up to 4,000 workers in forced labour, also of Pauling and Co., who built the harbour at Lobito and the terminus of the Benguella railway (Angola) in 1924/5, and the situation in Southern Rhodesia, where boys under fourteen without work or parents could be handed over to work for an employer for six months. Indentured labour was often worse, in the Dutch East Indies, for instance, 22,000 indentured workers were brought from Java to work in Surinam. See Memo on Forced Labour, 1st. June 1929, LAI (51-101), (IISH).

⁹⁶ It was during this session that Jomo Kenyatta, the future Kenyan leader, first appeared in Frankfurt. J. Murray-Brown claims that Kenyatta was recruited by an Afro-American, possibly Ford, (see J. Murray-Brown, *Kenyatta*, George Allen and Unwin Ltd., London, 1972, p.164) but the Kenyan had been in contact with Bridgeman and the British League since his earlier arrival in England.

⁹⁷ James W. Ford, an ex-postal clerk, was recruited from the American Negro Labor Congress, (formerly the African Blood Brotherhood), by the Communists. He stood as the Communist candidate for the Vice-Presidency of the USA on several occasions.

Bois, Garveyism, the West African Students Union, (WASU),⁹⁸ and the black South African labour leader, Clemens Kedourie.⁹⁹

A decision was taken during this session to convene an International Congress of Negro Workers which would meet in London and Ford was elected chair of a provisional committee set up to organise this. In 1930, the Committee wrote to the Executive Bureau of the National Minority Movement, asking for information on negro organisations in Britain, and the NMM was subsequently given responsibility for organising the first Negro Congress, originally scheduled for July 1st in London.¹⁰⁰ The Comintern expected national Communist Parties in the colonial powers to address the issue of black liberation with enthusiasm, and the CPGB itself was instructed to put more emphasis on the Negro question.¹⁰¹ But, following the MacDonald Government's refusal to allow the staging of the Conference in London,¹⁰² the venue was switched to Hamburg.

During the Conference proceedings, held on the 7th and 8th July, 1930, an International Trade Union Congress of Negro Workers (ITUCNW) was founded, its purpose being to organise Africans and the black diaspora on a class-struggle basis. Specifically, its programme was based on decisions of the Fourth RILU Congress regarding organisational work. The ITUCNW's objectives included 'organising the unorganised workers and drawing these into the international revolutionary class struggle'.¹⁰³ In addition to a series of pamphlets a monthly journal, *The Negro Worker*, which was initially edited by Ford, was issued by the Congress and generally carried news of strikes, injustices and repression.

⁹⁸ Although the WASU, essentially an organisation of middle-class intellectuals, avoided adopting a definite political stance, its wider political aims included the establishment of a united Africa and many of the Union's ex-members became leading players in the development of political movements in West Africa.

⁹⁹ Imanuel Geiss, *op.cit.*, p.333; J.R. Hooker, *op.cit.*, p.13.

¹⁰⁰ Minutes of NMM Executive Bureau meetings, 31-1-30; 27-6-30, Box 1, (JTC).

¹⁰¹ M. Sherwood, 'The Comintern, the CPGB Colonies and Black Britons, 1920-1938', a paper presented to a Conference on the History of the British Communist Party, Manchester, January 1994.

¹⁰² Allegedly in response to pressure from the South African authorities.

¹⁰³ In particular, to recruit black workers into white trade unions where possible and to establish contacts in West, Central and East Africa, for the purpose of linking up the workers there with the South African centre'. See *The Negro Worker*, Vol. 1, No. 4, December 1928, p.2.

The inaugural conference of the ITUCNW was attended by seventeen full delegates, representing 20,000 workers from seven countries, including Jamaica, Gambia, South Africa, Nigeria, the Gold Coast and the Camaroons.¹⁰⁴ The organisation's E.C. included Ford; Tiemoho Garan Kouyaute, who replaced Lamine Senghor as leader of the CDRN;¹⁰⁵ the Trinidadian, George Padmore; Albert Nzulu of the Federation of non-European Trade Unions, (South Africa); Frank Macaulay, leader of the Nigerian Workers Party, and E.F. Small, founder of the National Congress of British West Africa, NCBWA,¹⁰⁶ who represented Gambia's Labour Unions.¹⁰⁷ The involvement of Macaulay and Small, both of whom belonged to the traditional African establishment, can be seen as evidence that during its formative years, Communists were among the first to organise a black African labour movement.

George Padmore and Ford both travelled to Europe on false passports in order to attend the Frankfurt Congress. Padmore, who was elected as a West Indian delegate to the LAI's General Council at an E.C. meeting of the International League, held in Berlin on May 14th, 1931.¹⁰⁸ was one of the Comintern's most useful black recruits. He was based in Hamburg during the early 1930s as a representative of the International Negro Workers Bureau and took over as editor of the *Negro Worker*. During his years in the Comintern,

¹⁰⁴ Harry Heywood, op.cit., pp.328-9.

¹⁰⁵ Following Senghor's death in 1927 the CDRN, renamed the Ligue de la defense de la race negre (LDRN), continued to move left under the leadership of the Sudanese activists Tiemoho Garan-Kouyate and Abou Koite, developing close links with the French CP and the RILU. But divisions within the organisation led to a split in 1931, when Kouyate created the Union des travailleurs negres and its pro-communist journal, *Les Cris des Negres*, which was secretly distributed in the colonies. Although the LDRN reformed in 1934, its members by this time were increasingly turning towards Pan-Africanism - Kouyate, for example, left the Comintern that same year.

¹⁰⁶ The NCBWA was formed in March 1920, one of the earliest political organisations in Africa. The organisation, which established sections in Nigeria, the Gold Coast, Sierra Leone and Gambia, folded in the 1930s. See E.T. Wilson, op.cit., p.119.

¹⁰⁷ I. Geiss, op.cit., pp.333-334. Small was subsequently seen by Gambian police as a 'link subversive', despite his essential lack of militancy. See Basil Davidson, *Africa in Modern History*, Penguin Books, Middlesex, 1978, p.184.

¹⁰⁸ Other participants in the congress included the West Indian writer, C.L.R. James (See J. Murray-Brown, op.cit., p.164); William Pickens of the NAACP and Kouyaute. Padmore was particularly impressed by Kouyaute, with whom he worked on the editorial staff of the *Negro Worker*. See J.R. Hooker, op.cit., p.25; J.A. Langley, 1969, op.cit., p.85.

Padmore constructed a valuable network of international contacts, it was he who recruited Frank Macauley to Communism while in Nigeria in 1931.¹⁰⁹

Formation of The British Section of the LAI

Initial damage caused by the decision of the British Labour Party and TUC not to send delegates to the Brussels Congress was to some extent ameliorated by the positive reaction to the event of many individual British Socialists. However, the consistent antagonism of the Labour leadership towards the organisation which had emerged from it, exacerbated by the increasingly sectarian policies of the Communists, did eventually have a profound effect upon the development of the League's British Section. For example, despite the League's claim that Labour's membership ban had been ineffective at grass-roots level, attendance at the 1931 National Conference of the British League showed a fall of nearly a third on the 1928 total.¹¹⁰

According to Saklatvala, the idea of forming a comparable anti-imperialist organisation was discussed in Britain as early as 1924, when it was suggested that the Countess of Warwick might lend Easton Lodge as a venue where colonial nationalists and their supporters could meet to discuss its foundation. Preparations were made for the formation of the League in 1926, when twelve selected members of the Labour movement were appealed to, including Lansbury, Ellen Wilkinson, Kelly, Ernest Thurtle and Colonel Malone. Reginald Bridgeman was also approached. Detailed subjects for investigation were sent out to various countries and, when the answers were completed, meetings were called,¹¹¹ but initial responses were disappointing.¹¹²

Following the Brussels Congress however, interest grew and a decision to provisionally form a British Section of the League Against Imperialism was taken at a meeting held in

¹⁰⁹ I. Geiss, *op.cit.*, p.25.

¹¹⁰ Report of the Annual Conference of the LAI, British Section, February 1931, p.2, ID/CI/36/33, (LPA).

¹¹¹ Report of the First conference of the British Section of the LAI, London, 7-7-1928, (IISH).

¹¹² Only three M.P.s attended this first meeting.

the House of Commons on 8th April, 1927. Fenner Brockway took the chair, Reginald Bridgeman accepted the post of secretary and George Lansbury agreed to act as treasurer. Also present on this occasion were: Helen Crawford; Ellen Wilkinson; John Beckett M.P.; Mrs Beckett; James Crossley; William Rust - a leading member of the Young Communist League and later editor of the *Daily Worker* - Bakar Ali Mirza of the Indian Oxford Union; Harry Pollitt and Raymond Postgate, the writer son-in-law of Lansbury.¹¹³

The strength of support during these early months was reflected in the number and political diversity of the figures involved. In addition to those instrumental in its establishment, the League won the allegiance of Dorothy Jewson, the feminist and early Labour M.P.; Ben Riley; Ernest Thurtle; Sam Viant; Wilfred Wellock; Wilfred Paling and Rennie Smith - all serving Members of Parliament. Other prominent members included Father Conrad Noel,¹¹⁴ the Vicar of Thaxted and well-known Christian Socialist; Arthur Horner, a CP member and leading figure in the South Wales Miners Federation; Elinor Burns; the pacifist Runham Brown - one of the founders of the War Register's International - and A.M. Wall,¹¹⁵ secretary of the London Trades Council and a CPGB member who contested Streatham for the Party in the 1924 General Election.

By the spring of 1928, several new names had appeared on the Executive Committee. These were: the miners' leader A.J. Cook; T.I. Mardy Jones, M.P.; Alex Gossip; Clemens Dutt; Dr Robert Lyons; Joan Beauchamp - a CPGB member and author of *British Imperialism in India*, (1934) - who replaced Dorothy Jewson as treasurer and Mrs Baruch, the organiser. The changes prompted John Beckett to resign his position on the grounds that the E. C. had admitted communists to its ranks, and his departure was followed six months later by that of Ellen Wilkinson.¹¹⁶

¹¹³ Report of the Annual Conference of the LAI, British Section, February 1931, op.cit., p.3.

¹¹⁴ The Rev. Conrad Noel was the Vicar of Thaxted, often referred to as the 'red' vicar, because of his radical beliefs.

¹¹⁵ Report of the Annual Conference of the LAI, British Section, February 1931, op.cit., p.5.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., p.7.

By 1929, developments in the British section mirrored those within the International League as many non-Communist members left the organisation. In September of that year, the CPGB applied to affiliate to the British Section of the League which - in line with its parent organisation - no longer considered it necessary to play down Communist involvement. The Communist faction included a member of the CPGB's Political Bureau, who attended League meetings on a regular basis and reported back to Party colleagues.¹¹⁷ Maxton's expulsion was followed by the resignations of Mardy Jones, Dorothy Jewson and A.J. Cook. Conrad Noel took over the post of chair and Alex Gossip,¹¹⁸ general secretary of the National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades Association (AFTA), accepted the position of vice-chair.

In the wake of these departures, the National Section was dealt a further blow by the decision of the Labour Party's NEC at its November 27th meeting that the LAI was an organisation ancillary or subsidiary to the CP and therefore ineligible for affiliation to the Labour Party. This move effectively debarred League members from membership of the Party and prompted Labour's refusal to endorse Reginald Bridgeman's continuing candidature for the Uxbridge Division of Middlesex.

Bridgeman - who was expelled from the Labour Party in 1930 - had contested the seat for Labour in the 1929 General Election when, standing on an anti-imperialist platform against the victorious Unionist candidate, Major J.J. Llewellyn, he had increased the Labour vote by 7,963.¹¹⁹ Dr. Lyons, who was the prospective Labour Party candidate for Hendon, was also affected by the decision and subsequently left the League.

¹¹⁷ By 1930, five national organisations were affiliated to the British League; the CPGB, the NMM, NAFTA, UCW and the INC. See Minutes of a Meeting of the CPGB's Political Bureau, 17/18-6-1930, Reel 11, (CPA).

¹¹⁸ When a request by the League in 1927 for temporary use of the London Trades Council's postal address was refused on the grounds that such a move constituted a possible contravention of the Trade Union and Trades Disputes Act of 1927, Alex Gossip had agreed to allow the League to use his office address in Theobalds Road.

¹¹⁹ J. Bellamy and J. Saville, The Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol. 7, Macmillan Press Ltd., 1984, p.32.

Evidence shows that British Communists were confused over the role of the LAI following the abandonment of united front tactics,¹²⁰ perhaps reflecting a divergence between official Comintern policy and the views of some British Party leaders. While supporting the ultra-left line in relation to the situation in Britain, Rajani Palme Dutt, the Party's leading theorist, continued to adhere to Lenin's position on collaboration with colonial nationalists.¹²¹

The initial enthusiasm felt by many on the non-Communist left in Britain for the idea of an anti-imperialist organisation which united colonial activists and their European supporters, was evident. Their perseverance in the face of antagonism from colleagues and abuse from Communists emphasised their frustration with the LSI's lack of action on the issue of colonial liberation. Brockway, who would later use the League as a model for his own anti-imperialist initiative, The Movement for Colonial Freedom, fought particularly hard to convince leaders of the labour movement to lend their support, while Maxton continued to cooperate with the British League despite the humiliating treatment he received from the organisation's leadership.

Work of the British Section

Despite many setbacks, the British Section of the League Against Imperialism was rapidly acknowledged to be the most active of all the national sections, continuing to develop its operations as most of its counterparts in Europe declined. Initially, the organisation's work consisted mainly of formulating questions on the colonies and semi-colonies for sympathetic M.P.'s to raise in the House of Commons, a task to which Bridgeman, the League's secretary, was eminently suited. But at an E.C. meeting of the League, held in Brussels during April 1928, a decision was taken to reorganise the British Section in order that it should play a more active role - reflecting its importance as an anti-imperialist organisation operating within a leading imperialist nation.

¹²⁰ Minutes of Meetings of the CPGB's Central Committee, 11/12-1-1930 and 21-7-1930, Reel 1, (CPA).

¹²¹ John Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., pp.106-7. See R. Palme Dutt, Modern India, op.cit., for Dutt's views on this aspect.

As a first step, trade unions and labour organisations were invited to send delegates to a general conference in London on July 7th, 1928. The official number of delegates present at this event was given as 343, representing 170 branches, a claim which must be regarded as inflated, given the League's subsequent history. Alex Gossip took the chair and speakers included Harry Pollitt; Saklatvala; Fenner Brockway; Reginald Bridgeman; Tom Mann; Charlotte Despard; Srinivasa Iyengar of the INC and A.J. Cook.¹²² Cook moved the first resolution of the conference, 'World Imperialism and War', which warned that British miners and their colonial colleagues were 'victims of mutual assassination'.¹²³

The relationship between British unemployment and cheap labour in the colonies formed an important part of the League's message,¹²⁴ not least because many on the Labour left had come to share this view by the mid-1920s. The domestic burden of imperialism was constantly stressed - rising unemployment, increased taxes and intensified repression of domestic labour organisations were claimed to be a direct result of capitalist investment and general involvement in the Empire.¹²⁵ A League manifesto against Empire Day, (24th May, 1933), quoted the figure of £109 millions per annum required from the British budget to police the Empire.¹²⁶ Leading CPGB member, J R Campbell, in his 'Resolution on Imperialism and War' to the 1934 Annual Conference of the British Section, dismissed the British worker who fought for improved wages and Socialism in Britain whilst ignoring the colonial peoples' plight as a 'half emancipated slave'.¹²⁷ The promotion of such arguments was judged to be an essential method of countering the

¹²² Anti-Imperialist Review, Vol. 1, op.cit. Intriguingly, messages of support to the conference included the best wishes of Fung Saw of the London KMT, by that time an organisation denounced by the Communist hierarchy.

¹²³ The coal mining industry in China was cited as an example - here British investment was raising output, a growing quantity of which was exported, while wages remained as low as 6d for a twelve-hour day. See Report of the First conference of the British Section of the LAI, op.cit. The resolution was seconded by Pollitt, who concluded by appealing to all those opposed to imperialism to sink their differences.

¹²⁴ The Brussels Congress had addressed this issue in its Resolution on Imperialism. See Brussels Congress, 10th-14th February 1927, Resolution on Imperialism, (IISH).

¹²⁵ What Is The LAI?, British Section document, n/d, ID/CI/36/8, (LPA).

¹²⁶ 'What is Empire Day?', The Negro Worker, Vol. 3, No. 6-7, June-July 1933, p.11.

¹²⁷ J.R. Campbell, Resolution on Imperialism and War, November 1934, (RBP).

imperialist propaganda which surrounded the British working class and which the Labour movement did little to refute.

A number of journals were produced by the International League in an effort to disseminate its message to as wide a readership as possible. In addition to the *Anti-Imperialist Review*, which first appeared in July 1928, two editions of *Colonial News* were produced, of which some three thousand copies were distributed. The *Indian Front* monthly and *Zipnima*, a monthly bulletin for Cypriots were also published, financial aid was granted to the French Section's newsheet, *Le Journal des Peuples Opprimés* and help given in the distribution of *L'Orient Arabe*¹²⁸ The journal *Emancipation* was printed in Chinese and the League's monthly review of the situation in the Far East, *China News*, was described by Arthur Clegg as offering, 'the only reliable news in Britain about the Soviet areas of China established by the beleaguered Communists.'¹²⁹ A number of pamphlets covered events in China, India, Abyssinia, and Palestine,¹³⁰ supplemented by more general propaganda such as Conrad Noel's *The Meaning of Imperialism* and *The British Empire* (nd) and A. Rysakov's *National Policy of the Soviet Union* (nd).

The League's work focused primarily on India and China,¹³¹ and a succession of resolutions, leaflets, lectures, seminars and public meetings were organised by the British section. The British section's first demand was for a recognition of China's independence and the withdrawal of British and Indian troops from Chinese territory.¹³² This call was

¹²⁸ Report of the International Secretariat of the LAI, 1934, (RBP).

¹²⁹ A. Clegg, *Aid China 1937-1949, a memoir of a forgotten campaign* New World Press, Beijing, 1989, pp.15-16.

¹³⁰ These were:

A. Rysakov, *China's Appeal to British Workers*, 1930.
Bradley and Hutchinson, *India and a New Dictatorship*
The International Secretariat, *Abyssinia*
T. Johnstone and J.F. Sime, *Exploitation in India*.
Palestine, 1936.
China, 1936.

¹³¹ One specific case in which the League played a prominent part was that of Paul Reugg, secretary of the Pan-Pacific TUC, and his wife, who were arrested in June 1931 while living in the International Settlement in Shanghai. See Jean Jones, 1996, p.22.

¹³² Arthur Clegg, op.cit., p.17.

repeated in following years - in 1932 Harry Pollitt moved a resolution on 'China and War', which accused the Second International of openly supporting Japanese aggression against China. *China's Appeal to British Workers* was published in February 1931 and in December 1934, the League joined with the International Labour Defence Committee, ILD,¹³³ in a demonstration to commemorate the seventh anniversary of the Canton Commune.¹³⁴ As the threat from Japanese forces grew, the British section intensified its efforts on behalf of the Chinese people.¹³⁵ The League supported the formation of the Friends of the Chinese People and the International Peace Campaign and assisted in the creation of the China Campaign Committee, of which Bridgeman and Ben Bradley were members.¹³⁶

The importance of the struggle for national self-determination in India was underlined at an extraordinary meeting of the International Secretariat of the LAI, held on 10th May, 1930, when it was agreed to launch an India campaign. The British section was able to establish a number of useful contacts within India, one of whom was the Reverend Michael Scott, Chaplain to the Bishop of Bombay, and later to the Bishop of Calcutta.¹³⁷ It played a pivotal role in the campaign to obtain the release of the Meerut activists, drawing praise from Francis Jourdain of the French Section in his presentation of the International Secretariat's statement for 1932, and League members were involved in organising the Fourth Indian Political Conference on October 20-21st, 1934.¹³⁸

¹³³ The Communist-led ILD was known as International Class War Prisoners Aid, (ICWPA), until the early 1930s. ICWPA was a branch of International Red Aid, which was established by the Comintern in 1922 to aid victims of the class struggle.

¹³⁴ Letter, Reginald Bridgeman to the Labour Party's National Secretary, 29-11-1934, ID/CI/36/49, (LPA). The Canton Commune was part of an unsuccessful Communist rebellion which occurred in December 1927.

¹³⁵ A statement warning of the danger of war was released in April 1936 and a conference was convened in Manchester to discuss the issue.

¹³⁶ A. Clegg, 1989, op.cit., p.18.

¹³⁷ Michael Carritt, *A Mole in the Crown*, published by M. Carritt, Sussex, 1985.

¹³⁸ The New Indian Political Group, circular letter, 11-10-1934, ID/CI/54/4i, (LPA). This was organised in collaboration with the ILP, the Council for Civil Liberties, the League of Coloured Peoples, the Negro Welfare Association, the Young Communist League, the CPGB, Friends of the Soviet Union and the Irish Republican Congress. Those involved were Saklatvala, C.B. Vakil, Bridgeman and Bradley.

The League attacked both the composition of the Simon Commission¹³⁹ on India and the Commission's report, submitted in 1930. On one occasion, a public meeting was called to protest against the Labour Party's participation in the Commission. According to a report of the proceedings, which took place in Limehouse Town Hall during October 1928, the platform party consisted of Sam Elsbury,¹⁴⁰ Tarini Sinha,¹⁴¹ Bridgeman, James Maxton, Saklatvala and two leading INC figures - Mrs Sarajini Naidu,¹⁴² and Maulana Mohammed Ali. Speakers attacked the Labour Party's record in India - Saklatvala accused Labour M.P.'s of complicity in the shooting and imprisonment of strikers in India, and labelled them 'Downing Street Flatterers',¹⁴³ and the proceedings ended with an appeal to the workers of the area to vote for the CP candidates in the November local elections.¹⁴⁴

Bridgeman was extremely adept at exploiting the Labour Movement's confusion over the colonial issue. On January 19th, 1934, the General Secretary of the East India Railway Workers Union contacted the British League with an appeal for aid in the wake of an earthquake which had badly affected the area. Bridgeman immediately lobbied the British press and TUC for donations, eliciting a sharp rebuff from its General Secretary, Walter Citrine.¹⁴⁵ The League was able to make the point that this dismissive attitude was hardly compatible with Citrine's position as chair of the International Federation of Trade Unions, to which the Indian T.U. Federation had recently applied for affiliation. It subsequently reported that a mass meeting of workers in Calcutta had passed a resolution praising the League for its solidarity and regretting the attitude of the British TUC. Obviously stung by this criticism, Citrine issued a press statement claiming that League

¹³⁹ The Simon Commission was appointed by the British Government in 1927 to enquire into the workings of the dyarchic system of limited power sharing in India.

¹⁴⁰ At that time the CPGB's prospective Parliamentary candidate for South West Bethnal Green. See L.J. Macfarlane, The British Communist Party, its origins and development until 1929, Macgibbon and Kee Ltd., London, 1966, p.56.

¹⁴¹ Sinha, who chaired the meeting, was secretary of the ILP's Parliamentary Committee on Indian Affairs.

¹⁴² Mrs. Naidu was the sister of Virandranath Chattopadhyaya.

¹⁴³ Report for the International Department of the Labour Party on a public meeting held on 19-10-1928, p.2, ID/CI/36/14i, (LPA).

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Report of International Secretariat of the LAI, 1934, (RBP). Citrine was General Secretary of the TUC from 1925.

members were primarily concerned with 'exploiting the masses of India for their own ends'.¹⁴⁶

The British League continued to foster a broad range of involvement despite the Comintern's pursuit of a policy of separateness after 1928. A Youth Section was formed and special activities arranged. 'Workers' Theatres', which dealt with colonial conditions, were set up, special pamphlets and leaflets produced, study circles and debates organised. It was considered vitally important to counter the influence of imperialist propaganda in schools and to oppose 'Empire Day' celebrations and similar imperialist diversions. A 'Down with Empire' demonstration was organised on Empire Day, 24th May, 1930, leading to the arrest of fourteen communists at an open air meeting in Porth, South Wales. During December 1934, the League was involved in organising an International Students' Congress against War and Fascism, held in Brussels. Delegates - to whom Bridgeman, then International Secretary of the L.A.I., was able to 'render assistance . . . in the preparation and presentation of their statements and in the drafting of colonial resolutions.'¹⁴⁷ - included students from Indonesia, India, North Africa, French Guyana, Latin America and Afro-Americans.

Tactics included forging links with colonial students studying at British universities. Indian students in particular were targeted, but also Egyptians and Iraqis (who were notoriously difficult to contact because of close supervision by their respective legations) Chinese, West Indians and Africans.¹⁴⁸ The British League also provided a point of contact for the increasing numbers of African and West Indian nationalists who were arriving in Britain, offering invaluable practical help and encouragement at a time when African nationalist and labour movements were in their infancy.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ This work was mainly confined to the capital - Harry Pollitt complained to the 1936 League Congress that 'so many of the students from colonial countries confined their activities to the West End of London'. See LAI Conference Report, in *The Daily Worker*, 27th January, 1936.

¹⁴⁹ Annual report of the British Section of the LAI, May 21/22nd., 1932, (RBP).

This work was in accordance with the Comintern's new emphasis on Africa and the African diaspora after the sixth world congress. The emphasis was apparent in the attention given to the exploitation of black workers in Britain, as well as Africa, by the conferences of the League and the Minority Movement. Also in Padmore's contributions to *Labour Monthly* from 1930¹⁵⁰ and Palme Dutt's 1931 pamphlet, *Free The Colonies*, in which he argued for a workers charter for Africa. But this was a difficult area for the British League to expand. Prior to the Brussels Congress, British Communists had little contact with black Africa - unlike their French counterparts, whose theories had obtained considerable credit within French-speaking areas of the continent. Their success was principally a consequence of a larger, and more politically active African population of Paris compared to that of London. Groups such as Lamine Senghor's Comite de defense de la race negre for example, which aligned itself with the Communists.¹⁵¹

In Britain, the only significant organisation representing black and African interests at this time was the West African Students' Union, WASU, established in August 1925.¹⁵²

During 1934, the British League collaborated with the WASU in the Aggrey House controversy. Because African students in London had their own hostel accommodation independent of the authorities, the League was able to maintain close contact without alerting British officials. Thus, when the Colonial Office, with the support of the politically conservative League of Coloured Peoples, L.C.P., announced its intention to provide the students with a luxuriously furnished hostel in Bloomsbury,¹⁵³ the League joined with WASU in opposing the plan as a move to destroy the independence of the

¹⁵⁰ See *Labour Monthly*, June 1930, February 1931, April 1931, June 1931, May 1932 and September 1935 respectively.

¹⁵¹ See J.A. Langley, 1969, op.cit.

¹⁵² George Padmore, Jomo Kenyatta, CLR James and Nnamdi Azikwe were among those who attended WASU meetings during the 1920s and 1930s.

¹⁵³ Report of the International Secretariat of the LAI, 1934, (RBP). The hostel was named after the respected African intellectual, Dr. J.E. Kwegyir Aggrey.

African and West Indian students.¹⁵⁴ A mass meeting of students resulted in the establishment of a West African Students Hostel Defence Committee, on which Bridgeman served as a representative of the LAI.

In 1931, the Negro Welfare Association (NWA) was established as the British branch of the ITUCNW. Its officers included Reginald Bridgeman, chair; CPGB treasurer Hugo Rathbone, who took the post of treasurer, and secretary Arnold Ward. The organisation's aims were both social - it undertook regular community work among London's negro population, organising events such as annual summer excursions for the children¹⁵⁵ - and political - it functioned to expose exploitation in the British Empire and to support the struggle for colonial workers' rights. For example, the Association joined with the ITUCNW and the LAI to campaign against the setting aside of the 1930 Native Lands Trust Ordinance, which assigned land for use by African natives, following the discovery of gold in 1932. Throughout the early 1930s the NWA was absorbed in a campaign to free nine black American boys on trial for their lives, unjustly accused of raping two white women - the so-called Scottsboro case. In 1933 the Association, in collaboration with the LAI and the ILD, formed the Scottsboro Defence Committee, on which Bridgeman served as financial secretary.¹⁵⁶

An important point of contact with colonial workers was among the dockworkers and seamen in British ports. In December 1931, the League instigated a campaign to raise the consciousness of black and coloured people working or seeking work in the docks of

¹⁵⁴ These fears were reinforced by the revelation that the hostel would be administered by a management committee appointed by the Colonial Office itself. Harold Moody, founder of the LCP, was appointed as a mediator between the C.O. and WASU.

¹⁵⁵ *The Negro Worker*, No. 6-7, Vol. 4, June/July 1933, Copenhagen, p.32, ID/CI/36/40, (LPA).

¹⁵⁶ Other committee members were; Professor H. Levy, president; Mrs. Carmel Haden Guest, chair; Professor Lascelles Abercrombie, treasurer; Mrs. Gladys White and Jomo Kenyatta, joint secretaries; Vera Brittain; Norman Collins; Isaac Hutch; Prince Kessie; Naomi Mitchison and Eleanor Rathbone M.P. See Report of the International Secretariat of the LAI, 1934, (RBP). Nancy Cunard, daughter of the wealthy shipping family, organised British fund raising - efforts which included appeals to trade unions and a concert of black artists. The Committee also produced a pamphlet entitled *We Were Framed*, the first account of the trial to be published in England.

Cardiff and Liverpool.¹⁵⁷ Bridgeman took issue with the National Union of Seamen when, in 1933, the Union supported proposals by British shipowners to remove coloured seamen from their ships in order to qualify for government subsidies. The *Daily Herald* of December 8th reported that, 'stricter application of the law affecting the employment of coloured seamen on British Ships' had been demanded by the NUS in the light of some 50,000 unemployed white seamen. It was a demand supported in Parliament by the Labour M.P.s Arthur Greenwood and Lord Stabolgi. In contrast, Bridgeman argued the point that unless equal pay and conditions applied to all seamen, a general lowering of standards would follow.¹⁵⁸

The British League lobbied on behalf of the Kikuyu Central Association, KCA, on the question of land rights in East Africa, providing detailed questions and information to sympathetic M.P.s. Jomo Kenyatta, who was sent to London by the KCA in 1929, became closely involved with the LAI and the Communist movement for a time.¹⁵⁹ During his time in England, Kenyatta fell heavily into debt and relied upon assistance from the KCA and 'various Communistic organisations' to survive.¹⁶⁰ George Delf claims that the British League gave Kenyatta 'as much financial aid as its meagre resources permitted',¹⁶¹ while Norman Leys maintained that 'Communist money is his only possible source (sic) of getting the necessities of life'.¹⁶² In May 1933 he went to Moscow to study at the Lenin School, returning to Britain in the early Autumn and soon after he took a course of study in newspaper publication at the Marston Printing Company, which printed a number of Communist periodicals in the U.K..¹⁶³

¹⁵⁷ I. Geiss, op.cit., pp.343-7.

¹⁵⁸ Report of the International Secretariat of the LAI, 1934, (RBP).

¹⁵⁹ Kenyatta was initially introduced to the League by Isher Dass - later a member of the Kenyan Legislative Council - with whom he travelled to Britain. See D. Savage, 'Jomo Kenyatta, Malcolm MacDonald and the Colonial Office 1938-9, in *The Canadian Journal of African Studies* Vol. 3, No. 3, 1970, p.617.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., p.628.

¹⁶¹ George Delf, *Jomo Kenyatta*, Victor Gollancz Ltd., London, 1961, p.70.

¹⁶² Letter, Norman Leys to Winifred Holtby, 18-11-33, Winifred Holtby Papers, Hull Central Library.

¹⁶³ D. Savage, 1970, op.cit., p.627-8.

The League submitted evidence to the International Labour Organisation on the use of forced labour in Africa, publicising the high death toll among forced labour during the construction of the Congo-Ocean railway through French Equatorial Africa¹⁶⁴ and the rebellion of these workers in 1928. It also reported the issues behind the Nigerian general strike of 1929. In 1932, Padmore put Bridgeman and Ward in touch with Kobina Sekyi, a Gold Coast barrister and businessman who led the Gold Coast Aborigine's Rights Protection Society, ARPS.¹⁶⁵ The Society was not a mass organisation, having been created to protect middle-class interests, but it was the only politically active group in the Gold Coast at that time and as such was a valuable contact.

When in 1934, the ARPS sent a delegation¹⁶⁶ to London to protest against the implementation of two unpopular Bills by the Gold Coast Legislative Council, I.T.A. Wallace Johnson, an NWA member who wrote for the *Negro Worker*¹⁶⁷ and Bankole Awoonor Renner, president of the Ashanti Freedom Society,¹⁶⁸ contacted Bridgeman who arranged for Eleanor Rathbone and J.P. Mallalieu to put questions on the issue to the Secretary of State in the House of Commons. In 1934-5, the League publicised the suspension of civil liberties and the free press in the Gold Coast and campaigned in Britain for constitutional reforms in the colony, working in close association with the ARPS.¹⁶⁹

¹⁶⁴ The official death toll among the 127,250 African men who laboured to build the railway between 1921 and 1932, was 14,100. See Basil Davidson, 1978, op.cit., p.108.

¹⁶⁵ S. Rhodie, 'The Gold Coast Aborigines Abroad', in *Journal of African History*, Vol. 6, Part 3, 1965, pp.389-411. The ARPS, established in 1897 and based in the Gold Coast, was essentially a middle-class organisation which liaised between the British authorities and the African ruling elite. Sekyi was also the founder of the Gold Coast section of the NCBWA.

¹⁶⁶ The ARPS delegation, which arrived in England in June, 1934, and consisted of S.R. Wood and Tufuhin Moore, was a rival to the earlier Gold Coast and Ashanti delegation, led by the Paramount Chief of Akim Abuakwa, Nana Ofori Atta.

¹⁶⁷ Johnson, who wrote as W. Daniels or Abdul Mohammed Afric, also founded the Nigerian Workers' Union.

¹⁶⁸ Johnson and Awoonor Renner organised a West African Youth League in the Gold Coast during 1934. By the end of 1935, twenty branches had been established throughout the country. Wallace Johnson was prosecuted under the Sedition Bill in 1936 for an anti-imperialist article which appeared in Azikiwe's *African Morning Post*. See S. Rhodie, op.cit., pp.399-402.

¹⁶⁹ Bridgeman arranged for questions on the issue to be put to the House of Commons by Eleanor Rathbone and J.P. Mallalieu M.P. See Ibid., pp.401-2.

Following the invasion of Abyssinia by fascist Italy in 1935, the League supported the International African Friends of Abyssinia, IAFA, until 1937, when Bridgeman gave LAI funds to Padmore and others to establish a central anti-colonial directorate in London, which was known as the International African Services Bureau, IASB. The IASB, who published a monthly journal was entitled *Africa and the World*¹⁷⁰ and launched *International African Opinion* in July 1938, was founded to co-ordinate black organisations and promote Pan-Africanism.

Demise of the LAI

As the political climate of Europe darkened, the League's position became increasingly precarious. In December 1931, its head-quarters in Friedrichstrasse, Berlin, was raided by police¹⁷¹ yet - despite the threat posed by the growing power of the far-right in Germany and in the face of plummeting popularity in Britain¹⁷² - the Communists persisted with sectarian policies until 1934, a position which continued to take its toll on League membership.

At the 1932 Annual Conference of the British Section, held on 21st and 22nd May, the number of delegates present had fallen to 209.¹⁷³ Although attacks upon the ILP continued unabated - successful resolutions included one which accused the ILP of confusing the minds of the workers and of support for 'imperialist agents', namely the T.U.C. and Labour Party - Harry Pollitt's closing speech struck a sadly muted note. He acknowledged that many had left the League since the Brussels Congress; some had 'died at their posts', others had been expelled. In a divergence from the Comintern line, he regretted that only twenty-four trade union delegates had attended the Conference and urged those present to broaden the base of the League's work. The League, he insisted,

¹⁷⁰ The early editions of this journal were financed by League money.

¹⁷¹ The German authorities sought to justify their actions by claiming that the LAI was directed by the Comintern. See R.N. Carew Hunt, op.cit.

¹⁷² The 1931 general election produced disastrous results for CP candidates.

¹⁷³ Those elected to the E.C. were; Alex Gossip, Saklatvala, Conrad Noel, Bridgeman, Olive Driver, Percy Glading, Clemens Dutt, Arnold Ward, H.P. Rathbone, Dr. Vakil, Hannah Laurie, W.P. Hodge, Joan Beauchamp, W. Raylock and A.E. Fruitnight.

was not a party organisation, but one which endeavoured to bring together all who shared its aims.¹⁷⁴

Persecution of all sections of the left in Germany intensified following the Reichstag elections of July 1932, in which the National Socialists were returned as the strongest party.¹⁷⁵ The offices the WIR were subjected to police operations in September of that year, but it was the consolidation of Nazi power in 1933 which finally forced the LAI's International Secretariat to flee to Paris, where it remained for several months before moving to London in November.¹⁷⁶ The impact of these political developments and the lack of will within the Comintern to support the League was illustrated by Munzenberg who, in August 1933, asked to be relieved of his duties within the organisation, claiming an 'absence of any clarification, information or assistance in the work of the League'.¹⁷⁷

It is likely that the choice of London as the site for the International LAI's relocation was prompted to a large degree by an appreciation of Reginald Bridgeman's qualities. This remarkable man, who was totally dedicated to the struggle against colonial oppression, was a tireless worker for the anti-imperialist movement. A familiar sight in the cluttered, third-floor offices of the British League was that of Bridgeman, the smooth, elegant aristocrat, with sleeves rolled up, energetically sweeping the floor.¹⁷⁸ Following its transference to Britain, he took control of the organisation - now in considerable disarray -

¹⁷⁴ Report of the Annual Conference of the British Section of the LAI, 1932, (RBP).

¹⁷⁵ Minutes of a Meeting of the CPGB's Political Bureau, 4-2-33, Reel 14, CPGBA, MMLH.

¹⁷⁶ Meetings of the League's Controlling Body held between 1927 and 1933:

First World Congress (Brussels) - 10-15th February, 1927.

E.C. Meeting (Amsterdam) - 29-30th March, 1927.

E.C. Meeting (Cologne) - 20-21st August, 1927.

General Council Meeting (Brussels) - 9-11th December, 1927.

E.C. Meeting (Berlin) - 18-20th August, 1928.

E.C. Meeting (Cologne) - 15-16th January, 1929.

E.C. Meeting (Frankfurt-am-Main) - 20th July, 1929.

Second World Congress (Frankfurt) - 21-27th July, 1929.

General Council Meeting (Berlin) - 30th May-2nd June, 1931.

Meeting of Enlarged International Secretariat (Berlin) - 30th January, 1933.

This information illustrates that the period between the first and second World Congresses was a decisive one for the League. Following the Frankfurt Congress, there was a delay of nearly two years before the General Council met, during which time non-Communists left or were expelled from the organisation.

¹⁷⁷ Haikel, op.cit.,

¹⁷⁸ Author's interview with Arthur Clegg, 10-7-93.

and quickly became its mainstay. In the 1934 Report of the International Secretariat, he described the transition thus, 'All that was handed over to me on my appointment as the International Secretary of the League was a list of addresses which was not up to date and so of little value. It was necessary to reconstitute the work of the League from the beginning'.

Despite its parlous state, the re-constituted International Secretariat met eleven times throughout 1934, heralding a brief revival of the League's fortunes. In the course of that year, the indefatigable Bridgeman travelled to Brussels where he liaised with Commander Woodson of the Negro Bureau, undertaking to supply him with fresh outlets for the *Negro Worker* journal. He also surveyed the work of the International of Seamen and Harbour Workers Union, ISHW, in Dutch and Belgian ports in an effort to establish links with this organisation.¹⁷⁹ But circumstances continued to militate against the League. Bridgeman complained that the League had escaped Nazi persecution only to suffer increasing censorship and harassment from the British authorities and when questioned on the organisation's legal status the Home Secretary, Sir John Gilmour, confirmed that it was 'under observation'.¹⁸⁰

It was at this stage that some colonial militants, Padmore included, broke with the communist movement and turned to Pan-Africanism. They argued that Soviet Russia's search for 'collective security' had led to a softening of the Communist's anti-imperialism, pointing to the Soviet Union's decision to join the League of Nations in 1934, and to the policies of the Popular Front in France and in Spain from February 1936, as evidence of this retreat. At the October, 1935 E.C. meeting, which was attended by Bridgeman; Saklatvala; Pollitt; Bradley - now secretary of the British Section - and Percy Glading, Bridgeman addressed their claims.

¹⁷⁹ Report of International Secretariat of the LAI, 1934, (RBP).

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

He reported allegations of a tendency among the French comrades to 'concentrate attention on the strengthening of the united front, tacitly allowing the colonial question to be left alone.'¹⁸¹ In response, Harry Pollitt stated that the position of the League in Britain was quite clear; 'it must continue the struggle for the national independence of the conquered peoples as it had done in the past.'¹⁸² No Popular Front Government had been established in Britain and the CPGB was still able to exercise a considerable degree of autonomy in its colonial work, which it conducted in accord with the anti-imperialist united front advocated by Lenin.

By 1935, the LAI could no longer be described as an international organisation - most of the European national sections were struggling to survive - and its activities began to wind down. Bradley's report to a meeting of the E.C. of the International Secretariat held on October 9th, 1935, highlighted problems faced by the organisation by this time. While agreeing with his suggestion that the International Secretary should be relieved of all work relating to the British Section and that a regular League bulletin be issued by the International Secretariat, members acknowledged that 'with the present staff it was very difficult to undertake fresh work'.¹⁸³

Nevertheless, plans were made to form a Committee for the Defence of the Democratic Rights and Independence of the Egyptian People, in Britain and in France, which would aim to establish contact with the WAFD and possibly send a delegation to Egypt. Even at this stage, Bridgeman was anxious to extend the League's organisation in Europe, especially in Holland, Spain and Belgium, and Dumont undertook to investigate the possibility of developing a League in Belgium.¹⁸⁴

¹⁸¹ These allegations arose following Bridgeman's attendance at an international conference organised by the Committee for the Defence of the Ethiopian People, in Paris on September 3rd. See Report of the Executive Meeting of the International Secretariat of the LAI, 9th October 1935, (RBP).

¹⁸² Ibid.

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Minutes of an LAI International Executive Committee Meeting, 4th December 1935, (RBP).

By June the following year, Saklatvala's death had cut the E.C. to four. His portrait was reported to have dominated the 1936 Conference, during which many speakers paid tribute to his work.¹⁸⁵ Alex Gossip chaired the Conference proceedings, during which messages of support were received from the INC and the Rev. Conrad Noel. Harry Pollitt, who spoke on India, had earlier urged Communist members to ensure that this Conference was not a narrow one, but the 'medium through which we can develop a progressive line'.¹⁸⁶ Bradley sent out printed invitations reminding their recipients that 'the British ruling class have for many years carried on a brutal system of Colonial Government and have maintained their Empire by ruthless suppression and slave-driving methods'.¹⁸⁷

The scope of the Congress¹⁸⁸ - which was devoted to 'the British Empire and World Peace and the Mandatory System of Colonial Government' - was ambitious.¹⁸⁹ Communists were concerned to draw attention to the imperialist expansion of fascism and the danger of a new carve-up of territories through a broadening of the Mandates system.¹⁹⁰ In the second resolution of the conference, Lester Hutchinson claimed that after 1918, the Mandatory system was implemented as a device to achieve further annexation without attracting odium,¹⁹¹ while Bradley had earlier likened the extension of the Mandatory system to 'a gang of thieves sitting round and deciding on a redistribution of the swag'.¹⁹²

Neil Hunter, the 'anti-war delegate to Abyssinia', attacked the National Government's stance over the Italian action, while conference welcomed the 'heroic stand of Abyssinia against . . . modern armed forces' of imperialism and demanded Abyssinia's independence

¹⁸⁵ Report of the LAI's 1936 Conference, in The Daily Worker, January 27th, 1936. The official figures given for attendance at the conference was 236 delegates from 153 organisations, plus 44 visitors.

¹⁸⁶ Minutes of a Meeting of the CPGB's Central Committee, 4-1-36, Reel 7, (CPA).

¹⁸⁷ League Against Imperialism document, 1936, p.1, Sylvia Pankhurst Papers, (IISH).

¹⁸⁸ The Congress was held on the 25th and 26th January, 1936.

¹⁸⁹ League Against Imperialism document, 1936, p.1, Sylvia Pankhurst Papers, (IISH).

¹⁹⁰ Fears were intensified by events such as the visit by members of the Imperial Policy Group of the Foreign Affairs Mission to Berlin in January 1936. See The Daily Worker, 16th January, 1936.

¹⁹¹ Statement of the E.C. of the British LAI on the Proposed Extension of the Mandates System, 21-4-36, (Working Class History Library, Salford).

¹⁹² Ben Bradley, 'British Empire and the Colonies', in The Daily Worker, 22nd. January, 1936.

as a member of the League of Nations.¹⁹³ Bradley's report for the League's E.C. was followed by a 'lively discussion' in which Negro, Indian and other delegates participated.¹⁹⁴ But by this time the League's decline was irrevocable; the impending end was foreshadowed by a decision to reply to enquiries by the Pan-African Congress, PAC, regarding possible affiliation with the LAI thus; that while all associations with the PAC were welcome, the whole question of affiliation was being reviewed.¹⁹⁵

The sixth and final conference of the British Section was held in February 1937. Fraternal delegates in attendance were Krishna Menon of the India League, Isha Das of the Kenya Legislative Council and Dr. Wickhenasinehe, representing the Sama Samaj Party of Ceylon. Resolutions covered Abyssinia,¹⁹⁶ India, Palestine, Spain, Fascist Aims in Colonial Countries and Civil Liberties and Democratic Rights for Colonial People. In its final resolution, the League prioritised the struggle for democratic rights and civil liberties and pledged itself to win the support of the labour movement and all progressive organisations for the right of self-determination; universal adult suffrage; compulsory free universal education; freedom of speech, press and organisation; repeal of pass and poll tax laws; release of all political prisoners and the repeal of all anti-democratic and anti-working class laws. The decision to cease League activities was taken in the Spring of that year.

Conclusion

In a circular letter dated 11th May 1937, which announced the establishment of the Colonial Information Bureau - the Communist organisation which replaced the L.A.I. - Ben Bradley admitted that the League's work had been 'seriously hampered' by the Labour Party's ban and expressed sentiments in line with the Communists' popular front policy.

¹⁹³ Report of the LAI's 1936 Conference, in The Daily Worker, 27th. January 1936.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁹⁵ Report of an E.C. Meeting of the International Secretariat of the LAI, 7-6-36, (RBP).

¹⁹⁶ In its resolution on Abyssinia, the League resolved to 'establish contact with all organisations working on behalf of Abyssinia, to render all assistance to Abyssinian refugees abroad and to demand the right of assylum of Abyssinians in Kenya and other British countries adjacent to Abyssinia.' See Report of the Sixth Annual Conference of the LAI, 27th-28th February 1937, (RBP).

'Since its foundation in 1927', he wrote, 'the League Against Imperialism has done consistent work in connection with the different aspects of the colonial struggle; but it is essential that we should advance from the position of a small group of people interested in the colonial struggle, seriously restricted in their activities because of their association with a 'banned organisation', and activate the working-class . . . in the confident hope that they be brought into co-operation with the colonial peoples in the struggle against exploitation, war preparations and for democratic rights and freedom.'¹⁹⁷

The League had never fulfilled the aspirations of its creators - expectations that it would develop and function as a mass movement floundered in Britain, as elsewhere in Europe. Although regarded as the most successful of the national sections, there is no evidence to support Brockway's claim that the British League's foundation conference represented over 100,000 organised workers in the greater London area alone,¹⁹⁸ suggesting that such figures were produced for propaganda purposes only. A major stumbling-block was the lack of interest in colonial questions among the general population in Britain, a dissociation to a large extent reflected in the attitudes of the broad political left. It was peculiarly difficult to generate activity around colonial issues which many regarded as peripheral to their own lives and circumstances.

That this should be the case in Britain is less surprising when the situation in France is considered. French Communists reported in December 1926 that they had encountered 'total apathy' in their efforts to establish a LACO.¹⁹⁹ Yet colonial issues were promoted by sizeable emigre organisations in Paris and the anti-colonial milieu can be fairly presumed to have been larger than that of 1920s London. La Ligue Francaise contre l'Oppression Coloniale was eventually founded in January 1927, but even after the establishment of the LAI, the French section was unable to attract a large membership²⁰⁰ and soon found itself

¹⁹⁷ Ben Bradley, Circular Letter, 11-5-37, Ben Bradley Papers (henceforth BBP), Manchester Museum of Labour History.

¹⁹⁸ Report of the first Congress of the British Section of the LAI, 7-7-28, (IISH).

¹⁹⁹ Dr. M. Haikel, op.cit., p.22.

²⁰⁰ Figures reached around two hundred in 1928.

in financial difficulties.²⁰¹ In Holland, the national section's initial membership figure of 1,400 began to fall after twelve months, mainly as a result of Social Democratic opposition.²⁰² When Bridgeman visited the country in June 1933, Roestam Effendi, one of four Communist members of the Dutch Parliament, estimated the Dutch membership to be nine hundred.²⁰³

Bradley added a short footnote to the history of the LAI in 1943, when he wrote that it 'carried through a very important function during a certain period, and like other organisations that outlive their usefulness has passed into history'.²⁰⁴ If the criterion used to judge the effectiveness of the League is its self-avowed aim to coordinate the activities of colonial radicals and their sympathisers within the colonial powers, then the period between the 1927 Brussels Congress and the end that year must be regarded as its most fruitful period.

There is no doubt that the success of the Brussels Congress and the launch of the LAI was facilitated by the united front policy, which allowed organisers to build on the nucleus of sympathy which existed for individual causes. But the reversal during 1927 of this more benign attitude towards non-Communists in Europe and bourgeois-national movements in the colonies, had a profound effect upon the League's fortunes. In the event, the League's main success was as a lobbying and propaganda organisation on colonial issues, through which it exercised an important impact on left-wing politics.

Despite the obstructive political environment in which it operated, the involvement of members such as Reginald Bridgeman - who provided unswerving commitment to the anti-imperialist cause - enabled the organisation to act as the informed conscience of the left on this issue. The campaigns initiated by the British League with regard to China,

²⁰¹ The French League's failure to grow also stemmed from the fact that France's strong Communist Party tended to monopolise anti-colonial agitation in the country.

²⁰² *Anti-Imperialist Review*, Vol. 1, op.cit.

²⁰³ Report of International Secretariat of the LAI, 1934, (RBP).

²⁰⁴ Letter, Ben Bradley to A.G. Barker, 18-10-43, (BBP).

India and more specifically, to the Meerut case, ensured that the anti-imperialist issue could not be altogether ignored by the labour movement. It also generated publicity for colonial causes, was for many years an important source of information for Labour MPs, and provided an important contact point for colonial nationalists visiting Britain.

Evidence of the League's influence upon colonial nationalists is provided by Gopal, who cites the Brussels Congress as the 'turning point' in Nehru's political development,²⁰⁵ and by Padmore who praised the British section's 'work of enlightenment' long after his own break with Communism. He also acknowledged that the League attracted support from among a 'wide selection of progressive middle class people outside the narrow ranks of the Communist Party.'²⁰⁶ The gathering together of colonial activists and their supporters in Europe helped to create an international network through which radical ideas could be disseminated - E.T. Wilson even claims that the organisation had a 'marked effect' on the political development of Africa.²⁰⁷ For the CPGB, which was pursuing its anti-imperialist policies in India, the ideas and influences radiating from the Brussels Congress and the League did something to draw important future allies such as Nehru.

²⁰⁵ S. Gopal, op.cit., p.52.

²⁰⁶ G. Padmore, Pan Africanism or Communism? the coming struggle for Africa Dennis Dobson, London, 1956, p.328.

²⁰⁷ E.T. Wilson, op.cit., p.226.

CHAPTER THREE: THE MEERUT TRIAL AND ITS AFTERMATH

CPGB Activists in India

In the aftermath of the First World War, India witnessed a surge of nationalist agitation spearheaded by the Indian National Congress, which had found a new, radical and populist leader in Gandhi. This was an alarming development for Britain which had £1,000 million of capital investment in India by the mid-1920s, as well as a reservoir of Indian troops to help police the Empire. On the industrial front, an independent India posed a very real threat to the British textile industry, which was protected from full competition with its colonial counterparts at that time. For the Communists, who regarded India as the 'Achilles Heel' of the British Empire, the unrest presented an opportunity both to disrupt rule in the foremost imperialist power's most valued territory and to sow the seeds of Communist ideology in a region of major geographical and political import to the Bolshevik state. Consequently, the task of winning Indian nationalists to the anti-imperialist cause was prioritised by the Comintern and the CPGB carried full responsibility for the undertaking.

The British authorities in India, aware of Roy's efforts and of the potential for disruption, decided in the mid-1920s to stifle the Communist embryo. As early as the 25th November, 1919, the Indian Home Secretary, Sir William Marris, had warned that 'Though actual proof of Bolshevik activity in India is small, a serious situation might develop unless systematic protective measures are taken.'¹

The Government subsequently appointed two officers to advise on the Bolshevik question and most local governments attached a Bolshevik 'expert' to their staff. In 1924, an offensive was launched against the Communists, resulting in the arrest and trial of four

¹ Quoted in Richard Popplewell, British Intelligence and Indian Subversion: the surveillance of Indian revolutionaries in India and abroad, 1904-1920, Cambridge University PhD Thesis, 1988, p.287.

activists - S.A. Dange, Muzaffar Ahmed,² Shaukat Usmani and Nalini Gupta - in what became known as the Cawnpore Conspiracy Case. The imprisonment of these activists considerably hampered the progress of Communism in India and represented a major setback for Roy, who was also tried and convicted of conspiracy in his absence.³

By the mid-1920s, the Comintern had lost patience with Roy's attempts to establish a Communist Party in India and decided to pass responsibility to the CPGB, reasoning that British subjects had easier access to the British colonies and that direct contact could be maintained with Indian nationalists through British Communists. Percy Glading, who was sent to India to ascertain the strength of the Communist movement there, reported in July 1925 that he had not met any Indian Communists and that those contacts he had made were unfit for party work.⁴ These findings were hotly disputed by Roy, but perceptions of his personal failure, combined with his consistent opposition to the Comintern's line on the national and colonial question and the hostility of a number of his colleagues,⁵ all weighed against him. By February 1926, he was presiding over the sixth Enlarged Plenum of the ECCI as the speaker on Chinese affairs, having been sent to work with Michael Borodin in China.⁶

In response to Glading's report, a series of emissaries were dispatched to India by the CPGB, each charged with the task of organising Indian labour and co-ordinating the activities of the Indian left. The strategy which they employed involved the infiltration of existing trade unions and the INC through the medium of Workers' and Peasants Parties,

² Dange launched the Socialist journal in Bombay and Ahmed, who had been one of the Tashkent revolutionaries, the Langal, in Calcutta.

³ In Britain, an Indian Defence Committee was formed from Communists and Labour Party members but, despite their campaign, the defenders were each sentenced to four years imprisonment.

⁴ Communist Papers, op.cit., p.81.

⁵ Notably Saklatvala and Rajani Palme Dutt.

⁶ Roy was expelled from the Comintern in 1929 on the grounds of his 'right-wing orientations' - ironically, his movement towards a united front stance coincided with the Comintern's adoption of an ultra-left position.

(WPPs).⁷ The rationale behind these WPPs⁸ was the organisation of a mass membership in a legal party, functioning with a nucleus of Communists at its centre. As a bolster to these activities, Saklatvala embarked upon a hugely successful three-month tour of India in January 1927, during which he lectured on imperialism, attended a gathering of the embryonic CPI and met with two of the British emissaries - Philip Spratt and George Allison, a Communist ex-miner. Spratt, a Cambridge University graduate, had been instructed to take over the work begun by Allison, a Scottish coalminer sent to India by the RILU in the spring of 1926.

One of the emissaries was Ben Bradley,⁹ a London engineer and trade union activist - he was also an original member of the National Unemployed Workers' Committee Movement¹⁰ - who joined the CPGB in 1923.¹¹ Bradley had worked in India between 1921 and 1922, an experience which helped shape his political views. He later wrote 'It was during this short sojourn in India that I was brought into direct touch with the conditions of the Indian workers and I was extremely impressed by the terrible poverty and distressing conditions under which the working classes in India were forced to exist'.¹² Doubtless these earlier experiences of conditions in India and the strength of his reaction to them, coupled with his proven organisational skills, led to Bradley's inclusion in the small, select group of men sent to India in the late 1920s. In September 1927 he was directed to Bombay to join Spratt, his first task being to meet with Indian Communists to discuss their response to threatened wage cuts in the textile industry.¹³

⁷ P. Spratt, Blowing Up India, reminiscences and reflections of a former Comintern emissary, Prachi Prakashan, Calcutta, 1955, p.30. Also S.R. Chowdhuri, Leftist Movements in India: 1917-1947, South Asia Books, Columbia, 1977, pp.75-6.

⁸ The WPPs were first proposed by the Comintern in June 1923.

⁹ Jean Jones, Ben Bradley, fighter for India's freedom, The Socialist History Society, 1994.

¹⁰ The NUWM, a CPGB initiative, was formed in April 1921 and led by Wal Hannington.

¹¹ Ben Bradley, Notes, (BBP).

¹² Bradley's Defence Statement, p.558, (BBP).

¹³ New Age Weekly, 1-5-55, (BBP).

Operating in Bombay under the guise of a representative of his brother's¹⁴ firm, which boasted the unlikely name of the Crab Patent Under-drain Tile Company,¹⁵ Bradley joined his colleagues in the task of building a WPP as a legal cover for Communist activities and of organising the textile and railway workers. The clandestine nature of the emissaries' work involved methods which appear farcical by today's standards; cryptic messages, ciphers, invisible ink which failed to remain invisible and the use of pseudonyms.¹⁶ British CP organisers, who were novices at this stage of the operation, were redeemed by the fact that the clumsiness of their methods was surpassed by the incompetence of the Indian authorities. Money was channelled to the emissaries from London by various means; the prosecution at Bradley's subsequent trial named his younger brother Len as a co-conspirator, accusing him of transmitting party funds through the 'family business'.¹⁷

In the eighteen months prior to the end of January 1928, Bradley received £100 from the CPGB treasurer, H.P. Rathbone and £300 from the Workers' Welfare League of India, whilst Spratt received nearly £1000 from sources in London.¹⁸ However, as the CPGB lacked access to any substantial funds at this juncture it is fair to assume that most of the money was supplied by Moscow. In July 1925 the British Party had only £100 in hand for the purpose of sending Clemens Dutt to India on party business, yet was assured by Roy that Dutt's visit would not involve them in any expense - the implication being that Moscow would fund it.¹⁹

Indian Trade Unions

In a labour climate sharpened by the introduction of the 1926 Indian Trade Union Act - which restricted legality to those trade unions which were registered - the AITUC was

¹⁴ W.G. George Bradley.

¹⁵ S.R. Chowdhuri, op.cit., p.76; Letter, Ben Bradley to Len Bradley, 9-1-32, (BBP)

¹⁶ P. Spratt, op.cit., p.39; M.R. Masani, The Communist Party of India: a short history, Derek Verschoyle, London, 1954, p.29. Bradley's pseudonym during this time was 'Fred'.

¹⁷ Letter, Ben Bradley to Len Bradley, 9-10-32, (BBP).

¹⁸ M.R. Masani, op.cit., p.28.

¹⁹ Communist Papers, op.cit., pp.86-7.

targeted extremely effectively by Communists using the WPP²⁰ as their entrance ticket. At the seventh session of the Congress in March 1927, where a resolution supportive of the WPP was adopted, they succeeded in securing the election of G.C.Ghate, one of their number, to the post of assistant secretary.

In November of that year the Cawnpore Session witnessed the efforts of the British TUC to counter the progress of Communism by attempting to establish links with the Indian TU movement. A.A. Purcell and J. Hallsworth attended as TUC delegates and were instrumental in the defeat of a resolution calling for the AITUC to affiliate to the LAI, as well as the displacing of the WWLI²¹. However, the left did make some advances; D.G. Thengdi, Dange and Jhabvala were elected to office for the following year and it was agreed that a sub-committee be formed under the direction of Philip Spratt, to formulate a labour constitution for implementation by a future Indian government. It was during 1927 that the Indian working-classes celebrated May Day as international labour day for the first time.²²

But the highpoint of Communist success within the AITUC was reached at the 9th session at Jharia in December 1928, when their candidate for the presidency, D.B. Kulkarni, was narrowly defeated by Jawaharlal Nehru. The Communists Muzaffar Ahmad and Kulkarni were elected to serve as vice-presidents, S.A. Dange and Bakhole as assistant secretaries and Thengdi, Spratt and Bradley as Executive Council members, thus securing a bloc of Communist officials within the Indian TUC. Furthermore, there was compensation for Kulkarni's defeat. Nehru, one of the leaders of the left faction in Congress, was regarded as a potential ally at this time. He had developed a sympathy with Communist ideas through his participation in the Brussels Congress and he later used his casting vote at the

²⁰ The first WPP was created in Bengal in February 1926. Following Saklatvala's consciousness-raising visit later that year, more WPPs were established in the provinces and, in 1928, an All-India WPP was launched in Calcutta. See John Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., p.103.

²¹ V.V. Balabushevich and A.M. Dyakov (ed.), A Contemporary History of India, People's Publishing House Private Ltd., New Delhi, 1964, pp.170-171.

²² Prem Sagar Gupta, A Short History of the AITUC 1920-1947, AITUC Publications, 1980, p.94.

1929 Nagpur Conference of the AITUC to support a bid by the Communist-led textile workers' union, the GKU, for affiliation to the trade union body. This decision was taken against the advice of trade union leaders like N.M. Joshi, who challenged the GKU's membership figures.²³

The Communist group in Bombay led by Dange, Nimbkar, Mirajkar and Bradley was particularly effective. On 16th April, 1928, Indian labour flexed its muscles when three thousand workers struck at the Mahomedbhoy Currimbhoy Mill, a dispute which rapidly progressed into a general strike in the textile industry.²⁴ The trigger for this was the introduction of a rationalisation process by Bombay mill owners which had resulted in the dismissal of fifteen thousand operatives since the beginning of the year.²⁵ The authorities responded to the workers' resistance with violence - police killed trade union activist, Paraswami Jadad, as he agitated for a general strike during a GKU meeting, thus providing the strikers with their first martyr.²⁶

Initially, the strike call was not a unanimous one. Dissent within the trade unions led to the Communist section of the Girni Kamgar Mahamandal joining with the Bombay Millworkers' Union to form the GKU, which was officially registered on 23rd May, 1928.²⁷ But the overall response to the strike was a testimony to the efforts of the activists; 150,000 workers struck and tens of thousands attended mass meetings, which were almost the only method of conveying information in the face of widespread illiteracy and government censorship. The WPP organ, 'Kranti', was the only Indian Communist publication at that time and any Comintern-connected literature, such as M.N. Roy's

²³ Bipan Chandra (ed.), The Indian Left - critical appraisals, Vikas Publishing House PVT Ltd., New Delhi, 1983, p.23.

²⁴ S. Roy (ed.), Communism in India - unpublished documents, 1925-1934, Ganashakti Printers Ltd., Calcutta, 1972, H/P 28 FI/28, 1-3rd. May, 1928.

²⁵ V.V. Balabushevich and A.M. Dyakov, op.cit., p.196.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ B. Chandra, op.cit., pp.19-20.

Masses of India, which was published in Berlin, had to be smuggled in from outside, often wrapped in 'acceptable' books and newspapers.²⁸

It is important to understand the weakness and instability of the Indian trade union movement prior to Communist activity, in order to appreciate the enormity of the task facing the CP. The Bombay textile workers had 'no effective union until 1926',²⁹ many trade unions were formed spontaneously during the course of industrial action and consequently folded when the dispute ended. Furthermore, the number of workers employed in Indian industry tended to fluctuate wildly, making it extremely difficult to organise Indian labour.³⁰

Inefficiency and ineptitude within the immature trade union movement also helped to facilitate Communist influence. For example, the secretary of the Bombay Millworkers' Union D. R. Mayekar, who was expelled after being accused of embezzlement, was replaced by the Communist K. N. Joglekar.³¹ However, throughout the action Communists were careful to function as part of a joint strike committee which included non-Communists, an alliance made possible by the belief amongst more constitutionalist trade union leaders that unity was vital during the formative stages of the Indian labour movement.

The Communists worked tirelessly to build the Girni Kamgar Union into the most powerful textile union in India, taking its membership from less than four hundred at its inception to approximately fifty-four thousand by the end of 1928.³² The GKU was built around a democratic structure - one particularly effective method was to encourage the

²⁸ *New Age Weekly*, op.cit., (BBP).

²⁹ S. Joshi, op.cit., p.80.

³⁰ Ibid., p.95; V.V. Balabushevich and A.M. Dyakov, op.cit., p.68.

³¹ S. Roy, op.cit.

³² Bipan Chandra, *India's Struggle for Independence 1857-1947*, Penguin Books, New Delhi, 1989, pp.217-219; Also Richard Newman, *Workers and Unions in Bombay 1918-1929*, Australian National University, Canberra, 1981, p.216.

rank and file workers to start factory or mill committees on the Soviet model with the intention of drawing the ablest of these into the leadership of the union and the party.³³

Concurrent with their efforts to organise the textile industry, British Communists were also active within the oil industry, the jute and paper mills and the railway unions. Bradley was vice-president of both the the Bombay Railworkers' Union, BBCI, and the Great Indian Peninsular Railworkers' Union, GIP. He often travelled across India to speak to and advise workers on these lines, relying upon the hospitality of the men and their families.³⁴ The rail workers, who 'acquired an anti-imperialist consciousness with far greater ease than any other section of the working class',³⁵ were willing to demonstrate their solidarity during the strike and employees on the Great Indian Peninsular Railway downed tools in support of the textile workers.³⁶ Such loyalty was all the more commendable as many of these people suffered a high price through the loss of their livelihood. Despite this militancy however, efforts by Bradley and K.N. Joglekar to widen the action into an all Indian Railway strike were unsuccessful.³⁷

The strike held firm for six months despite government attempts to split the workers along a religious divide by using Pathan Muslims - seasonal workers in Bombay - as strike breakers. *This sustained resolve was attributable in large measure to the formidable organisation behind the strikers.* Volunteer corps were formed to keep order in the streets and to ensure that strike breakers did not gain entry to the mills, whilst the WPP undertook the task of collecting food donated by sympathetic villagers.³⁸ In the face of such determination, the mill owners were forced to make concessions - pickets were

³³ S. Roy, op.cit., H/P 18/VII KW Secret; Labour Monthly, Vol.11, No.12, December 1929, p.471; B. Chandra, 1983, op.cit., pp.21-22.

³⁴ New Age Weekly, op.cit., (BBP).

³⁵ S. Joshi, op.cit., p.210; L. Jagga, 'Colonial Railwaymen and British Rule: a probe into railway labour agitation in India', in B. Chandra, 1983, op.cit.

³⁶ On one occasion a local trade union leader, Kuppuswamy Naiker, and twenty-four workers lay across tracks at Villupuram station, preventing a train carrying police reinforcements from entering Bombay. See V.V. Balabushevich and A.M. Dyakov, op.cit., p.198.

³⁷ S. Joshi, op.cit., p.201.

³⁸ V.V. Balabushevich and A.M. Dyakov, op.cit., pp.195-7.

allowed to man the mill-gates, the employers agreed to meet union representatives and, by the end of October, they had recognised the GKU. When the strikers returned to work in September, they did so at the old rate of pay, but with the Fawcett Commission appointed by the Indian Government to investigate their wage rates and conditions and with a pledge that strike leaders would not be persecuted. Ironically, the Commission was due to submit its report just three days after mass arrests of the labour leaders began.³⁹

Government Reaction

Between 1927 and 1929, there was an intensification of strikes and demonstrations by workers and radical nationalists, the latter being particularly incensed by the appointment of the Simon Commission. The Commission, which had no facility for Indian representation, was boycotted by the AITUC and the Labour Party was criticised by Nehru for participating in the process through its representatives, Clement Attlee and Vernon Hartshorn. When the Commission arrived in India, it was met by a general strike, demonstrations and widespread rioting during which workers in Bombay burned effigies of Ramsay MacDonald, the Secretary of State and other British officials in the streets.⁴⁰

Percival Griffiths, the author of a history of the Indian police, maintains that during this time the necessity of anti-Communist work 'imposed a very heavy burden on the police, and was indeed one of their most important tasks'.⁴¹ By the end of 1928 the Government of India believed the Communists to be in complete control of the labour situation, 'hardly a single public utility service or industry remained which had not been affected by the wave of Communism that swept the country that year'.⁴² Communist representatives on strike committees were described as 'virtual dictators', who had managed to marginalise the voices of moderates like N.M. Joshi and Chamanlal.⁴³

³⁹ J. Bellamy and J. Saville, The Dictionary of Labour Biography, Vol. VII, Macmillan Press Ltd., London, 1984, pp.84-91.

⁴⁰ S. Saklatvala, The Fifth Commandment, Manchester Free Press, Manchester, 1991, pp.391-2.

⁴¹ Percival Griffiths, To Guard my People - the history of the Indian police, Ernest Benn Ltd., London, 1971, p.352.

⁴² S. Roy, op.cit., H/P/1934 F7/16; B. Chandra, op.cit., p.219.

⁴³ Ibid, H/P/1928 F/18/Vii KW Secret.

Despite this concern, the authorities did not consider the Communist movement *itself* to be a serious threat at that time. Their anxiety stemmed from the belief that, 'there is a tendency for the political and the Communist revolutionaries to join hands'.⁴⁴ This anxiety was reinforced when, at the end of 1928, a letter from M.N. Roy to Muzaffar Ahmad, which disclosed the Communist tactic of using WPPs as legal cover for their activities, was intercepted by the authorities. Commensurate with the CP's policy of using seamen as couriers to deliver letters, literature and even monies, this particular message had been given to a seaman, Abdul Haquin, to deliver to the WPP offices. Haquin forgot to hand over the letter, which he found during his next voyage and posted on from Aden. The contents were subsequently read aloud to the Legislative Assembly and became Exhibit number 377 in the prosecution case at the notorious Meerut conspiracy case.⁴⁵

Thus, the Government of India, besieged by the mill owners' associations and increasingly nervous of the growing spectre of co-operation between radical nationalists and the far left, reacted with a cocktail of measures.⁴⁶ The prime concern of the authorities was to drive a wedge between Communists and the nationalist movement and in their view, the most effective method was to expose the true nature of Communist aims and tactics, thereby proving that Communism was essentially antithetical to the nationalist cause. H.G. Haig, secretary to the Home Department, wrote to the prosecuting counsel in the Meerut Case, J. Langford James, 'from the political point of view it would be an advantage to be able to convince in general as early as possible that Communism is not the kind of movement that should receive the sympathy of nationalists'.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid. H/P 28 F1/28 May 1-3rd.

⁴⁵ Muzaffar Ahmed, 1970, *op.cit.*, pp.456-457.

⁴⁶ This prompted George Allison, who had recently been released from an eighteen-month prison sentence imposed for his political activities in India, to inform the LAI Conference that 'it takes a brave man to be a trade unionist or a nationalist', in that country. See Report of the first Conference of the British Section of the LAI, *op.cit.*

⁴⁷ S. Roy, *op.cit.*, Draft D-D, No. 347, p.2, Letter, H.G. Haig to Langford James, 9-4-29.

Disagreements ensued over the most effective way with which to proceed. Memories of Philip Spratt's arrest and trial on charges of sedition in August 1927, when he was released after a jury found in his favour, counselled caution. One suggestion was the possibility of a prosecution case being brought against Jawaharlal Nehru and Subhash Bose, leaders of the INC's left wing and organisers of the Independence for India League,⁴⁸ as a deterrent to others. Nehru's links with the LAI had exposed him to scrutiny by the authorities, who regularly intercepted his correspondence with Virendranath Chattopadhyaya - then the League's International Secretary - and others.⁴⁹ However, it was eventually decided not to risk the mass resistance which this course of action might trigger. It was also originally proposed to deport Bradley and Spratt and a Bill designed for this purpose was prepared,⁵⁰ but as Isemonger, the Director of Intelligence Bureau pointed out, deportations would be unlikely to deter future Communist emissaries. Furthermore, to prosecute Indian Communists whilst merely deporting British Communists could justifiably be interpreted as racial discrimination.⁵¹

Following months of discussions and consultations between the Government of India, local governments and the Secretary of State, it was finally decided to run a comprehensive conspiracy case against Spratt, Bradley, a third Briton, Lester Hutchinson⁵² - who was not a CP member - and leading Indian Communists such as Muzaffar Ahmad; S. A Dange, General Secretary of the GPU; K.N. Joglekar and R.S. Nimbkar, the charge being that of 'Conspiracy to Deprive the King-Emperor of the Sovereignty of British India'. The Deportation Bill was nonetheless proceeded with as another weapon to use against future Communist infiltration and following its rejection by the Legislative Assembly on 11th April, 1929, the Viceroy issued a Public Safety Ordinance on April 13th.

⁴⁸ The Independence for India League was formed in 1928.

⁴⁹ J. Bellamy and J. Saville, op.cit.; B. Chandra, 1983, op.cit., p.61.

⁵⁰ S. Roy, op.cit., Telegram P., Viceroy to Secretary of State, 8-7-28.

⁵¹ Ibid., Isemonger to S.G/ Haig, 20-9-28.

⁵² Hutchinson was a twenty-four year old British journalist who went to India to work on the Indian Daily Mail and later became editor of the WPP paper, New Spark. One of his activities was to organise study circles for young Indian intellectuals to read Marxist literature.

The Meerut Trial

Arrests began on 20th March, 1929, three days before Sir Charles Fawcett's Committee - set up by the Government to look into the Indian cotton industry - published its report.⁵³ Thirty-one people, including Bradley⁵⁴ and Spratt, were detained in the initial trawl, with one more - Lester Hutchinson - arrested on June 14th. Most of these were Indian trade unionists, including the majority of the GKU officials. This triggered protests, which the government had hoped to avoid, that the authorities were intent upon persecuting organised labour. Nehru himself defended the men: 'How little do these accused persons know about the Comintern', he asked, 'I know a lot more than they'.⁵⁵

The choice of Meerut as the trial venue was based on several considerations. A small town in the United Provinces, it was suitably remote from the major industrial centres of unrest - eight hundred miles from Bombay and Calcutta, for example. Because there was a branch of the WPP in Meerut, the authorities reasoned that conspiratorial acts must have taken place there. Furthermore, in the large Presidential towns where a High Court of Justice existed, defendants would have been entitled to a trial by jury with its potential for acquittal. Jury facilities were not available in Meerut, where the case would be heard by an unqualified District Judge.⁵⁶ In the event, Judge R. L. Yorke presided, a civil servant who was assisted by five lay assessors.⁵⁷ In this context alone, the trial highlighted the absurdity of the system of justice operating in India at that time. Michael Carritt, when writing of his experience as a civil servant in India in the inter-war years, recalled that about half the Indian Civil Service at any one time could not speak or understand Bengali

⁵³ Circular Letter, 1-1-31, Box 6, File 1, (JTC).

⁵⁴ Bradley was conducting rail union business in northern India at the time of the arrests, staying at the home of the left-wing Congressman, Arjanpal Sethi, and was not detained until several days later. See Shaukat Usmani, Tribute to Ben Bradley, The Daily Worker, 7-1-57.

⁵⁵ Quoted in S. Gopal, op.cit., p.69.

⁵⁶ S. Roy, op.cit., H/O/1929 F10/IV.

⁵⁷ J. Bellamy and J. Saville, op.cit.

at all. This included 'officers who were engaged full-time in trying court cases where all the proceedings were (notionally) in Bengali'.⁵⁸

Defence applications for the trial to be transferred to the High Court were rejected and bail was refused for the majority - the defence was conducted by Dr K.N. Katju, who later became Minister of Defence in the Indian Government. The preliminary proceedings opened in April 1929 and lasted for eight months, most of which were devoted to the prosecution's case, after which the actual trial began on 31st January, 1930. Prosecuting Council, J. Langford James, described by Spratt as a 'witty lawyer', opened for the Crown on June 12th and spoke for several days, but he did not live to develop his case. Following his death three months after the trial's commencement a rather more plodding Mr Kemp took over as prosecuting solicitor.⁵⁹

In its entirety, the Meerut Trial lasted nearly four years and cost approximately £250,000.⁶⁰ The charges against the accused, which did not include any allegations of overt violence or illegality, cited sixty-three organisations and individuals as co-conspirators including Rajani Palme Dutt, Harry Pollitt, M. N. Roy, and 'other persons known and unknown and not before the court'.⁶¹ The prosecution called nearly three hundred witnesses, including specialists such as a handwriting expert,⁶² and submitted nearly three thousand books and documents, including many classical texts on Socialism and Communism which, it claimed, made their authors co-conspirators.⁶³

Apart from the duration and sheer complexity of the trial, there were additional problems for the authorities. Because the prosecution made liberal use of Marxist publications, the accused - many of whom were, as Nehru suggested, largely ignorant of Marxist theory -

⁵⁸ M. Carritt, op.cit., p.56.

⁵⁹ P. Spratt, op.cit., p.51.

⁶⁰ New Age Weekly, op.cit., (BBP).

⁶¹ 'The Meerut Case', 13/5, (BBP).

⁶² Letter, Meerut Prisoners Defence Committee, MPDC, to Hindustan Times, copy received by London branch of MPDC on 7-2-31, (BBP).

⁶³ 'The Meerut Case', op.cit., (BBP).

needed to be equally well-informed. The British Meerut Prisoners' Defence Committee provided a well-stocked library and 'so thorough was the study that many of these works were translated ... into vernacular languages. These translations all found their way out for publication.'⁶⁴ In addition, the prisoners took full advantage of the platform which the court case provided to expound their ideas and policies. As a result, the country's leading newspapers reproduced long speeches which, under normal circumstances, would certainly have been banned.

During the first six months of the trial, the demand for Marxist literature in India increased twentyfold.⁶⁵ The publicity gave the Communists a truly national profile for the first time, and made heroes of behind-the-scenes plotters such as Rajani Palme Dutt and M.N. Roy.⁶⁶ K.N. Joglekar noted of the authorities in his Committal Order Statement that 'They have done the greatest service to Indian Revolution by gloryifying our ordinary elementary trade union and national emancipatory work to the heights of scientific revolutionary deeds'.⁶⁷

The trial finally ended in August 1932, after a prosecution summing-up which spanned nearly two months. The judge took approximately five months to complete his deliberations; judgement was delivered on 16th January, 1933 and covered 675 foolscap pages. The sentences, when pronounced, reflected the importance which the government attached to the case. Muzaffar Ahmed was condemned to transportation for life; Dange, Ghate, Joglekar, Nimbkar and Spratt received twelve years; Bradley, S. Mirajkar, (secretary of the British-India Steam Navigation Company's Staff Union), and Usmani, ten years. Lester Hutchinson and the remaining defendants were each sentenced to four years imprisonment.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ *New Age Weekly*, op.cit., (BBP).

⁶⁵ Minutes of a CPGB Central Committee Meeting, 11/12-1-1930, Reel 1, (CPGBA).

⁶⁶ Before the conclusion of the Meerut trial, Roy returned to India secretly, but was apprehended by the police and sentenced to twelve years imprisonment for his part in the Cawnpore Conspiracy. This was later reduced to six years on appeal.

⁶⁷ CP/ORG/MISC/6/11, (CPGBA).

⁶⁸ 'The Meerut Case', op.cit., (BBP).

The Reaction

Reaction to the arrests, rather like the development of the trial, proved to be counter-productive for the Government. Many leading nationalists sprang to the defence of the accused. Nehru argued that the affair represented a government offensive against textile workers which would enable the Master Cotton Spinners' Federation to cut wages in Lancashire and other textile areas.⁶⁹ The INC, which held the principle of not offering defences before the British courts,⁷⁰ was sufficiently disturbed to move from this position and form a Meerut Defence Committee, MDC, of which Nehru was a leading member and his father, Motilal, chairman. Congress launched this organisation with a donation of 1,500 rupees and Nehru wrote to Walter Citrine with representations on the subject.⁷¹

It is possible that the authorities had failed to appreciate the shift to the left within Congress. In December 1928, radical delegates had met at a 'Republican Congress', during which Nehru was elected president and Muzaffar Ahmed became one of the general secretaries - effectively consolidating the left bloc within the INC.⁷² By 1929 this militant section was gathering strength; at the Lahore session in December of that year a resolution was adopted which rejected Dominion status and called for the complete independence of India. Simultaneously, many advocates of non-violence 'began to waver in that faith'.⁷³

Resistance to the trial in Britain was led by the LAI. Bradley claimed that 'Only the agitation carried on by the LAI made it possible for the case to be known even after the sentences', (had been passed). The LAI, took 'the initiative in bringing into existence the Meerut Prisoners' Defence League, (MPDL), which was the only organisation that made it

⁶⁹ Reginald Bridgeman, 'The World Struggle Against Imperialism', in Labour Monthly, No. 11, July 1929.

⁷⁰ S. Gopal, *op.cit.*, p.68.

⁷¹ Letter, Nehru to Citrine, 9-9-29, Box 3, File 2, (JTC).

⁷² B. Chandra, 1983, *op.cit.*, p.18.

⁷³ Kanji Dwarkadas, India's Fight for Freedom 1919-1937: an eyewitness account, Popular Prakashan, Bombay, 1966, p.368.

possible for us to conduct the appeal'.⁷⁴ The British National MPDL was established in August 1929, with Reginald Bridgeman, then secretary of the LAI's British Section, as its secretary, and Joan Thompson, who wrote under the name of Joan Beauchamp, as treasurer.

Membership included the M.P.s James Maxton, Fenner Brockway, T.I. Mardy Jones, and W.J. Brown. Trade union representatives were A.J. Cook (Miners Federation), Alex Gossip (National Amalgamated Furnishing Trades Association) and George Hall (The Workers Union), whilst S. Saklatvala, Robert Dunston and J. T. Murphy represented the CPGB. Other delegates were Helen Crawford, Workers International Relief; Bob Lovell, International Class War Prisoners Aid; C.B. Vakil and C. P. Dutt, Workers Welfare League of India., (all CP members); T.P. Sinha from the ILP and representatives from various Indian organisations in England.⁷⁵ Local branches were formed throughout the country, including one amongst Oxford undergraduates.⁷⁶

One of the Meerut prisoners, Shaukat Usmani, was adopted as the CPGB candidate for Spen Valley in the 1929 British Parliamentary election in order to highlight the Meerut trial in Britain. The sitting M.P. in this Yorkshire constituency was Sir John Simon, architect of the Simon Report. There was no expectation of victory, in the October 1931 election, when Usmani stood as the CPGB candidate for South East St. Pancras, he polled only 332 votes, but was able to use his candidature to issue an appeal from his prison cell for support of the colonial peoples' struggle for freedom.⁷⁷

The LAI and the MPDL fought extremely hard to keep the issue of the Meerut prisoners alive in Britain, proposing resolutions at conferences, instigating demonstrations and preparing questions for the House of Commons which were put down by sympathetic

⁷⁴ Bradley's own notes, (BBP).

⁷⁵ J. Bellamy and J. Saville, op.cit.

⁷⁶ Letter, Bradley to Len Bradley, 24-11-32, (BBP).

⁷⁷ Noreen Branson, History of the Communist Party of Great Britain: 1927-1941, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1985, p.71.

M.P.s such as Fenner Brockway and James Maxton. Bridgeman sent open letters on the Meerut case to the sixty-fourth annual TUC Conference, held in Newcastle in September 1932 and to the thirty-first Annual Labour Party Conference, which convened in Scarborough in October 1931, with additional copies to around a thousand local Labour Party branches.⁷⁸

Various pamphlets were published - one contained extracts from eight of the prisoners' defence speeches, including part of Bradley's speech which dealt with the history of the Indian trade union movement.⁷⁹ April 19th, 1931 was declared Meerut Day - nationwide demonstrations were organised, including a gathering in Trafalgar Square at which one of the badges worn by the Meerut prisoners during their trial was raffled for funds. In May of that year a protest rally was held at the House of Commons and a petition of six thousand signatures presented to the Government. Numerous letters were written to various individuals and organisations - Reginald Bridgeman wrote to Gandhi asking for his support and received a reply which was non-committal.

The campaigners had a wide range of allies on the left. When writing to press Arthur Henderson - then secretary of State for Foreign Affairs - to halt the trial, Bridgeman was able to enclose a letter of support from Roger Baldwin, chair of the New York-based International Committee for Political Prisoners, a precursor of Amnesty International. As an expression of their support the ICPP had donated \$100 to the MDC.⁸⁰ Letters expressing concern over the issue were sent to the Manchester Guardian by such substantial figures as H.G. Wells and R.H. Tawney, and representations on behalf of the prisoners were sent to the Secretary of State from the Archbishop of York.⁸¹ Yet the Labour leadership, which was safely established in government some weeks before the formation of the MPDL, adopted a somewhat dismissive attitude towards the disquiet of

⁷⁸ Annual Conference Report of LAI's British section, 21-22nd. May, 1932, op.cit.

⁷⁹ Ibid.; CP/IND/MISC/17/2, (CPGBA).

⁸⁰ J. Bellamy and J. Saville, op.cit.

⁸¹ Letter, Archbishop of York to Secretary of State, 12-12-29, (BBP).

its own grass-roots. In reply to letters which began arriving at Transport House as early as April 1929, William Gillies, the Labour Party's International Secretary, maintained that the full facts of the case were 'not commonly understood', specifically the fact that 'all the arrested men were Communists'.⁸²

Following the verdicts in January 1933, a Meerut Prisoners' Release Committee, MPRC, was established and by November of that year had raised £1,094.72.⁸³ Officers of the MPRC were Jack Tanner, who took the chair; Percy Glading and William Howell, both of whom served as secretary; and Alex Gossip, treasurer.⁸⁴ Other members included James Maxton M.P., George Buchanan M.P., John Jagger of NUDAW, Dr. A.C. Banerji, Bridgeman, Pollitt, Joan Beauchamp, Joseph Reeves of the Co-operative Movement; J.P.M. Miller of the NCLC; Ellen Wilkinson; C.E.M. Joad; L. Simms of ILD; J.F. Horrabin; John Beckett; Maurice Dobb; Middleton Murray; Father Conrad Noel, the Vicar of Thaxted; W. Neasham of NAFTA and T. Knibbs, Len Bradley, H. Hinshelwood and Joe Scott, all representing the AEU.⁸⁵ By this time the Comintern was rethinking its hard-line stance on co-operation with Social Democrats, enabling the CPGB to set up a broad organisation, 'embodying as far as possible many influential people outside the revolutionary movement'.⁸⁶ It was suggested that the campaign should be built on the scale of that launched by the CPUSA in defence of the radicals Nicola Sacco and Bartolomeo Vanzetti.⁸⁷

The British Labour Movement

By June 1929, political developments in the Imperial Power had sparked some optimism amongst the defendants. The election of a Labour Government the previous month seemed to offer the possibility of a review of the case, especially as the 1927 Labour Party

⁸² A.J. Williams, *Labour and Russia*, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1989, p.83.

⁸³ Annual Conference Report of LAI, 20-11-33, (RBP).

⁸⁴ Letter, Bridgeman to Bradley, 24-2-33, (BBP).

⁸⁵ J.Bellamy and J. Saville, op.cit.; CP/IND/MISC/17/2, (CPGBA).

⁸⁶ Percy Glading, Report on Meerut, Minutes of a Meeting of the Political Committee, 4-2-33, (CPGBA).

⁸⁷ Sacco and Vanzetti were Italian immigrants to the US who were unjustly accused of murder and armed robbery and eventually executed.

Conference had passed a resolution calling for the release of political prisoners in India, and Labour's 1929 election programme, 'Labour and the Nation', included a statement on the desirability of self-determination for India. However, such optimism was unfounded. Attlee's role in the Simon Commission should, perhaps, have served as a warning. A defiant Bradley declared to Jack Tanner, 'Let the Labour Government take the responsibility of refusing the most elementary right of a jury trial',⁸⁸ and the new government did prove to be, as H.N. Brailsford described, 'weak and impotent' on this issue.⁸⁹

Prior to 1929, Labour had relied on the Advisory Committee on Imperial Affairs to formulate its colonial policies, but once in office, the opinions of the Civil Service held sway.⁹⁰ Wedgwood Benn, the newly appointed Secretary of State for India, accepted the assurances emanating from the Indian authorities that this case did not constitute an attack upon Indian trade unions, but was a necessary offensive against Communist insurrection. He rejected all calls for an amnesty, despite protestations that the prisoners had been arrested for criticism which 'would have been legitimate in any democratic country'.⁹¹ Drummond Shiels, the Under-Secretary of State for India, was forced to defend the Government's stance in response to questions from Fenner Brockway and Alex Gossip at the October 1929, Labour Conference, where he confirmed that permission had been given for a CPGB member to travel to Meerut to act as an advisor to the defendants. This was to have been John Ross Campbell, but his permit was later withdrawn.⁹²

⁸⁸ Letter, Bradley to Jack Tanner, 21-1-30, Box 3, File 2, (JTC).

⁸⁹ H.N. Brailsford, Rebel India, Leonard Stein and Victor Gollancz Ltd., London, 1931, pp.63-65.

⁹⁰ Sir Drummond Shiels, 'Sidney Webb as a Minister', in Margaret Cole (ed.), The Webbs and their Work, Frederick Muller, 1949, p.206.

⁹¹ Fenner Brockway, The Indian Crisis, Victor Gollancz Ltd., London, 1931, pp.63-65.

⁹² The official reason for this withdrawal was that Campbell was not intending to travel in the company of a British Counsel as originally agreed, but a different reason is cited in P.S. Gupta, Imperialism and the British Labour Movement 1914-1964, Macmillan Press Ltd., London, 1975, p.204. It was the dropping of a prosecution against Campbell under the incitement to Mutiny Act by the 1924 Labour Government which contributed to its subsequent defeat. Labour was sensitive to any move which might recall the episode. See also J. McNair, op.cit., pp.135-7.

Elements of the Labour left were increasingly unhappy with their Party's policies. As early as 1924, the ILP had pressed the then Labour Government to initiate discussions with Indian politicians on a formula for immediate independence and, at its 1929 Annual Conference, pledged support of colonial independence on demand.⁹³ Brockway, who acted as joint secretary of the British branch of the INC prior to 1920⁹⁴ and served as chair of the ILP's Imperialism Committee,⁹⁵ played a leading role in persuading his colleagues to support India's right to freedom.⁹⁶ The Meerut trial provided further cause for unease - the ILP organised a public meeting demanding the release of the prisoners in May 1931⁹⁷ and, according to A.J. Williams, it was that Party which gave Ramsay Macdonald 'his most uncomfortable moments'⁹⁸ over India. Throughout the second Labour administration, Indian affairs continued to cause internecine strife and embarrassment for Labour leaders - during 1930 for example, Brockway was suspended from the House of Commons for challenging the decision to imprison Gandhi.⁹⁹

Whilst in office, the Labour Party hierarchy presented a consistent obstacle to the Meerut campaigners. In 1931 a donation for the MPDL of \$500 from the Labour Defence League in New York was intercepted and returned by the British authorities. According to Wedgwood Benn the reason for this action was a statement in the covering letter that the money was intended for distribution to 'victims of British Imperialism'. This, he argued, proved that it was to be used for the furtherance of Communism in India.¹⁰⁰ Approaches by the LAI to rank and file Labour Party members were also blocked. When South

⁹³ Report of the N.E.C., ILP Annual Conference, 1929, pp.15, 32, 47-8; Conference Agenda, p.19, (LPA).

⁹⁴ Fenner Brockway, Inside the Left, Allen and Unwin, London, 1942, p.119; M. Nicholson, op.cit., p.88

⁹⁵ Stephen Howe, Anti-Colonialism in British Politics, Oxford, 1993, p.70.

⁹⁶ P.S. Gupta, op.cit., pp.93-4. The ILP claimed to be the main supporter of Gandhi in Britain. Brockway and Tarini Sinha, secretary of the ILP's Parliamentary Committee on Indian Affairs, were consulted by Wedgwood Benn and prepared a paper which recommended the release of political prisoners in India and the espousal of a clear commitment to Indian self-rule, but their views were not accepted. See Fenner Brockway, 1942, op.cit., pp.203-4.

⁹⁷ Notification of a Public Meeting to Demand the Release of the Meerut Prisoners, n/d, (BBP). Speakers were David Kirkwood M.P., John Kinley M.P. and Jack Dallas.

⁹⁸ A.J. Williams, op.cit., p.83.

⁹⁹ This was followed by a demonstration in the House by John Beckett, who seized the mace and carried it across the floor. New Leader, 9-5-30, 25-7-30.

¹⁰⁰ Letter, Wedgwood Benn to Fenner Brockway, 25-6-31, (BBP).

Croyden Constituency party asked the National party for guidance over a resolution on Meerut submitted by the League, the reply merely re-stated the party line that the organisation was subsidiary to the Communist International and should therefore be shunned.¹⁰¹

The response of the TUC leadership echoed that of its Labour Party counterparts. There is little doubt that the Communists had stolen a march on the British TUC over India - Marjorie Nicholson maintains that the three Commonwealth Labour Conferences of 1925, 1928 and 1930, were 'the only forum in which representatives of colonial labour organisations could join their British colleagues in an effort to thrash out a long-term colonial policy'.¹⁰² In April 1928 the TUC had debated a report compiled six months earlier by Hallsworth and Purcell, in which they urged the British trades union movement to give practical assistance to Indian workers. They recommended that the TUC General Council appoint four representatives to work with four AITUC colleagues in organising Indian workers. Their advice was ignored after the Council decided that the cost of sending full-time trade union organisers to India - an estimated £8,000 a year - would be too high, and that the money was needed at home. The Communists' work with Indian labour was thus allowed to continue virtually unchallenged - except by police action.¹⁰³

The TUC General Council's report to the 1929 Conference did express concern that the arrests of Indian labour activists would have a 'deterrent effect' on trade union work and that the Government of India was 'taking action against Indian trade unions behind the proceedings against those charged with conspiracy'¹⁰⁴ But it nevertheless insisted that the majority of the Meerut prisoners were Communists or 'fellow travellers' and, at the 1930

¹⁰¹ Letter, South Croydon Labour Party to National L.P. secretary, 1-12-32, and reply, 2-12-32, (BBP).

¹⁰² Marjorie Nicholson, *op.cit.*, p.134.

¹⁰³ P.S. Gupta, 'British Labour and the Indian Left', 1919-1939', in B.R. Nanda, Socialism in India, Delhi, 1972, p.87; P.S. Gupta, 1975, *op.cit.*, p.110; M. Nicholson, *op.cit.*, p.159.

¹⁰⁴ TUC General Council Report, 1929, p.227.

and 1931 conferences, the TUC leadership rejected moves to support the prisoners.¹⁰⁵ Indeed, an accusation was laid before Manchester and Salford Trades Council by the TUC representative and erstwhile advocate of Anglo-Soviet co-operation, Albert Purcell, that Spratt and Bradley had misappropriated TUC funds sent to aid Indian trade unions, and used them to further their Communist activities.¹⁰⁶

There is evidence that this attitude was adopted in the face of grassroots opinion. Gupta refers to the Government being 'inundated' with protests from trade union branches.¹⁰⁷ At a meeting of the CPGB's Political Bureau in February 1933, Lytton spoke of 'a big response from trade union officials, Labour Party delegates, trades council secretaries and delegates and they are ready to attach their signatures to any memorial', of the Meerut prisoners,¹⁰⁸ while Lancashire textile workers joined with their counterparts in Moscow and elsewhere to raise substantial revenue for the cause.¹⁰⁹

Bradley's union, the Amalgamated Engineering Union, AEU, was closely involved with the campaign to release the prisoners, but not in an official capacity. The National MPL received a donation from Thomas Knibbs, London District Secretary of the AEU, in August 1929, but could not acknowledge it publicly, as the union was unable to associate itself directly with the MPDL.¹¹⁰ In Spring 1929, The WWLI organised a deputation to the Secretary of State for India, with the help of the AEU,¹¹¹ and Jack Tanner - the union's

¹⁰⁵ Walter Citrine stubbornly refused all requests for official TUC backing, including a plea from Lala Girdharilal, secretary of the Central Meerut Defence Committee, made on behalf of Nehru. See J. Bellamy and J. Saville, *op.cit.*

¹⁰⁶ Document, n/d, n/t, (BBP).

¹⁰⁷ P.S. Gupta, 1975, *op.cit.*, pp.203-4, n.15. Gupta writes that Wedgwood and Walter Citrine discussed the issue and concluded that these protests were not a genuine reflection of the views of the British working-class, but were orchestrated by Bridgeman's committee. He adds that it is impossible to verify or disprove this conclusion as most of the protests were according to the India Office records, destroyed when the papers were bound.

¹⁰⁸ Minutes of a Meeting of the CPGB's Political Bureau, 4-2-33, (CPGBA).

¹⁰⁹ *New Age Weekly*, *op.cit.*; V.V. Balabushevich and A.M. Dyakov, *op.cit.* Many Indian students in Britain who supported the Labour Government were bewildered by its stance on the Meerut prisoners and consequently did not take part in the campaign; there was also a fear that if they were involved, the authorities would stop their funding. See Nirmal Sen Gupta, *op.cit.*, Chpt.3.

¹¹⁰ Letter, R. Bridgeman to Jack Tanner, 3-8-1929, in Box 3, File 2, (JTC).

¹¹¹ Letter, J.E. Potter Wilson to Jack Tanner, 21-6-29, also Letters from R. Bridgeman to Jack Tanner, 23-6-29, 27-7-29, in Box 3, File 2, (JTC).

District Organiser -addressed a special meeting of Brixton AEU on the subject of Meerut in October of that year.¹¹² At the beginning of 1931, a letter signed by Jack Tanner, Joe Scott and Percy Glading was circulated to all AEU branches, appealing for funds to fight the case.¹¹³

Although not all of Bradley's fellow trade unionists approved of his activities, they generally wished him well.¹¹⁴ In 1930 a 'London committee for the Defence of B. F. Bradley' was formed at the instigation of Brixton branch of the AEU, and proceeded to organise an unofficial meeting of union members in Essex Hall on 16th August 1930. Speakers were Reginald Bridgeman, Tom Mann and Jack Dallas of the AEU with Jack Tanner in the chair.¹¹⁵

Bradley later wrote that he believed the trial had a great impact upon British workers, he was often told by CP members that they had joined the party as a result of the Meerut campaign.¹¹⁶ This view is shared by Professor John Saville, who claims that, 'there is no doubt ... that the practical agitation around the trial deepened the growing sentiment in favour of the Indian independence movement' and that the national MPDL 'obtained a much wider general sympathy than the Communist and labour left'.¹¹⁷

By the Spring of 1933, the pressure of grassroots opinion nudged the labour leaders, now in opposition, into action. Claud Cockburn's newspaper *The Week*, claimed that the opposition to the right-wing bosses within the labour movement forced them 'into following the Communist lead in protesting against the outcome of the Meerut Case',¹¹⁸ and into organising a national demonstration in Hyde Park on May 7th 1933. Around the

¹¹² Letter, R. Bridgeman to Jack Tanner, 2-11-29, Box 3, File 2, (JTC).

¹¹³ Circular, 1-1-31., Box 6, File 1, (JTC).

¹¹⁴ Letter, Knibbs to Bradley, 28-7-31, (BBP).

¹¹⁵ Document, n/t, n/d, (BBP).

¹¹⁶ *New Age Weekly* op.cit., (BBP).

¹¹⁷ J. Saville, 'Britain: Internationalism and the Labour Movement Between the Wars', in Fritz van Holthoon and Marcel van der Linden (eds.), *Internationalism and the Labour Movement 1830-1940*, E.J. Brill, New York, 1988.

¹¹⁸ Patricia Cockburn, *The Years of the Week*, Macdonald and Co. Ltd., London, 1968, p.71.

same time the National Joint Council of the Labour Party, TUC and Parliamentary Labour Party, finally issued a pamphlet on the affair entitled *Meerut - Release the Prisoners*, which included a foreword by Walter Citrine. As far as Bridgeman was concerned it was too little, too late. He complained that it dealt only with the legal aspects of the case and studiously avoided any political conclusion; it omitted any appeal for funds and failed to offer suggestions of possible action to serve the prisoners' release.¹¹⁹

In Prison

Throughout their time in prison, the Communist fraternity remained well-organised, holding and minuting regular meetings and producing a journal, *The Indian Soviet Weekly*, which was sold to raise funds for their defence.¹²⁰ The Defence Fund was held jointly in Muzaffar Ahmed's and Bradley's names and Bradley was responsible for sending regular reports to London, included with weekly letters to his brother, Len. The climate in Meerut was particularly harsh for the British prisoners - extremely hot in summer with temperatures often rising to 115 degrees Fahrenheit, and falling bitterly cold at night. At one point an outbreak of cholera in which two prisoners unconnected with the Conspiracy Case died, led to the Meerut group being transferred to Dehra Dun prison for a short period¹²¹ and between September and November 1932 they were moved to Almora gaol, where the weather was cooler.

Some months after their arrest, the political prisoners became involved in a hunger strike precipitated by complaints over prison conditions, and by September 15th all the group were fasting. The action ended on the 29th of that same month, after Nehru sent a telegram to the Superintendent of Meerut gaol outlining an INC resolution appealing to the prisoners to end their hunger strike,¹²² and an INC Working Committee elicited a pledge from the Government to review prison procedures. It was the practice to allot

¹¹⁹ Letter, R. Bridgeman to Bradley, 19-5-33, (BBP).

¹²⁰ J. Bellamy and J. Saville, op.cit.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Telegram, Nehru to Superintendent of Meerut Gaol, 28-9-29, Box 3, File 2, (JTC).

terrorists Class 'C' status - which allowed few basic amenities, but in reality the conditions under which the Meerut group were kept were fairly lenient - there were few complaints regarding the food, for example.¹²³

Lice and boredom were cited as the main irritants by Spratt, although there were complaints that correspondence was being censored. Problems did occur on an ideological level however - the fact that the prisoners were from diverse political backgrounds inevitably led to disagreements. Even so, differences were not confined to those between Communists and non-Communists, but surfaced amongst the Communist group itself - the implementation of the 'class against class' policy being a root cause of friction among the prisoners.

Undoubtedly, the arrest of its leaders constituted a severe setback for the fledgling Indian Communist organisation. J.T. Murphy stated gloomily in January 1930 that there was 'no CP at all' in India, adding that, with the Meerut prisoners in the dock, the authorities were 'beheading the Indian revolutionary movement.'¹²⁴ But the truth was that the Communist International itself had dealt Indian Communism a blow with the introduction of the new line. Under this strategy - which was scheduled to be discussed by the Indian Communist leaders in March 1929, had their arrests not pre-empted the meeting¹²⁵ - the INC was denounced as a bourgeois party, a supporter of imperialism and dupe of the masses,¹²⁶ while erstwhile allies such as Nehru were dismissed as national reformists.¹²⁷

The policy was refuted by the majority of CPGB delegates to the sixth Congress, including Clemens Dutt, the official representative of the CPI. But such dissent was

¹²³ Letter, Ben Bradley to Len Bradley, 30-9-32, (BBP).

¹²⁴ Minutes of a Central Committee Meeting, Reel 1, 12-1-30, (CPGBA).

¹²⁵ B. Chandra, 1983, op.cit., p.24.

¹²⁶ The Egyptian Wafd Party was similarly denounced as a 'party of national betrayal', while Gandhi was accused by Saklatvala of 'playing for and working for the capitalists'. See Anti-Imperialist Review, November-December 1932, p.38.

¹²⁷ John Callaghan, 'The Heart of Darkness: Rajani Palme Dutt and the British Empire - a profile', in Contemporary Record, Vol. 5, No. 2, Autumn 1991, Frank Cass, London, p.267.

short-lived, the CPGB had no choice but to accept the new line once the Congress had ended, although many of its leading members continued to believe in the wisdom of working with colonial nationalist elements sympathetic to the Communist cause. The Workers' and Peasants' Parties, established to encourage the masses to participate in political activity, lost Comintern support and were dissolved. This move was also opposed by British Communists, who argued that they should be retained as intermediate organisations controlled by the CP,¹²⁸ and by many Indian Communists who regarded the WPPs as CPs in 'Indian shape'.¹²⁹

The sectarian policy also caused divisions within the Indian trade union movement, resulting in a sharp fall in GKK membership to around 800 by the end of 1929.¹³⁰ The right-wing of the AITUC broke away to form the National Trades Union Federation, citing the decision of the 9th Session¹³¹ to affiliate with the LAI, together with the organisation's affiliation with the Pan-Pacific Secretariat - the Asian Bureau of the Comintern¹³² - as the cause of its discontent. The Communists, led by B.T. Ranadive and S.V. Deshpande, subsequently attempted to split the AITUC from the INC and, when their efforts failed, left to form the Red TUC from around twelve newly-established trade unions.

These same divisions were reflected amongst the prisoners. One clash occurred between adherents to official policy and sympathisers of Roy who, having been expelled from the Comintern in December 1929 for his opposition to the new line,¹³³ returned to India in

¹²⁸ J. Degras, *op.cit.*, Vol. 3, 1971, p.20.

¹²⁹ *Inprecorr*, Vol. 8, 8-11-28, p.1473.

¹³⁰ B. Chandra, 1989, *op.cit.*, p.219; B Chandra, 1983, *op.cit.*, pp.24-5.

¹³¹ The ninth session of the AITUC was held in Jharia in 1928.

¹³² S.C. Bose, *The Indian Struggle 1920-1942*, Asia Publishing House, Bombay, 1964, p.154; M. Brecher, *Nehru: A Political Biography*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1959, p.141.

¹³³ Roy's expulsion was secretly decided at the tenth Plenum of the EECI, in July 1929, but not officially announced until December of that year.

1930 in an attempt to reclaim his former position.¹³⁴ In another incident, Shaukat Usmani broke with the Communists towards the end of 1932 and moved into separate barracks.¹³⁵

Lester Hutchinson, who had played a prominent part in building a youth movement in Bombay, was one of those who rejected the new ultra-leftism.¹³⁶ Bradley faithfully reported Hutchinson's 'transgressions', (which appear to have consisted of affiliations towards the INC), to London. In a letter to Percy Glading he accused Hutchinson of 'individualism', described him as a 'bad egg' and complained that he appeared to have won Kulkarni, then president of the Red TUC, to his side.¹³⁷ This dispute was not without repercussions for the British operation. Hutchinson's mother, Mary Knight, was a founder member of the CPGB in Manchester and an active campaigner for the Meerut prisoners in that area.¹³⁸ She was a staunch supporter of her son and Bridgeman complained that the Manchester MDC was undermining the British campaign by promoting the Hutchinson line.¹³⁹ The Manchester District Party had issued a leaflet stating that the bourgeois revolution meant revolution by the bourgeoisie and that when the workers took control it

¹³⁴ S.R. Chowdhuri, op.cit., p.96. Roy was arrested in Bombay on 21st July, 1931. Following his release from internment in 1936, he set up the Radical Democratic Party, RDP, and his support for the war effort led to his being courted by the British authorities as the authentic voice of Indian workers. Critics attacked his alliance with Jamnadas Mehta, president of the Railwaymen's Union, who was described as a former 'puppet' Minister, 'closely allied to financial circles in Bombay'. See NewsIndia, Vol. 3, No. 7, September-November 1941, p.10. At the end of the war, he turned away from Marxist ideas, abandoned party politics and dissolved the RDP in 1948.

¹³⁵ Letter, Bradley to Len Bradley, 11-11-32, (BBP). According to Spratt, Usmani, who had been a member of the Indian emigres group in Moscow in the early 1920s, took this action following the revelation that three Indian companions who had accompanied him to the VI Comintern World Congress in Moscow had been shot as spies. See P. Spratt, op.cit., p.42

¹³⁶ S. Roy, op.cit., H/P/29 F10/IV.

¹³⁷ Letter, Bradley to Glading, 16-9-32, (BBP). There was an attempt to heal the rift after the sentences were reviewed, Bradley wrote in November 1933 that Hutchinson had expressed certain regrets over some of the things which had occurred and the two later collaborated on the pamphlet India Under Dictatorship and shared a platform at a House of Commons meeting in January 1934.

¹³⁸ Ruth and Eddie Frow, The Communist Party in Manchester, North West History Group, Manchester, 1979. Mary Knight was Labour Party representative for the New Cross ward of Manchester City Council between 1938-58, and served as an Alderman from 1958-65. Lester Hutchinson eventually became the Labour M.P. for Manchester Rusholme in 1945, but was expelled from the Party in 1949 because of his criticisms of the Labour Government's foreign policy and - along with D.N. Pritt, Konni Ziliacus and others - became part of the group of ex-Labour M.P.s who called themselves 'Labour Independents'. Nevertheless, many of his erstwhile comrades continued to regard him as a careerist who repudiated parts of his Meerut defence statement in order to become 'respectable'.

¹³⁹ Annual Report of the LAI British Section, 1932, op.cit.; Letter, Bridgeman to Bradley, 30-9-32, (BBP).

became a proletarian revolution. This was counter to the current tenet, that the Indian working-class would wage a single struggle.¹⁴⁰

The sectarian position constrained the work of the CPGB in Britain during this period and raised the doubts of many members. In August 1930, the Political Bureau of the CPGB decreed that the Meerut campaign should be broadened from the defence of the Meerut prisoners into a crusade to cover all repression in India.¹⁴¹ It was decided that MPDCs should be absorbed into the LAI as 'Hands Off India' Committees; letters were sent to local Meerut committees asking them to re-form into League branches and in most cases this was agreed to.¹⁴²

The logic behind the dissolving of the Meerut Committees was to slough off the so-called 'sham lefts' who had been associated with the campaign and thus strengthen the role of the Party. The network of united front organisations which grew so successfully under Munzenberg's direction were no longer seen to be the way forward; 'The Party must liquidate the tendency to substitute the auxilliary organisations for the Party, or to transfer the leadership of the masses to the auxilliary organisations.'¹⁴³ But, as George Allison pointed out, the new Committees would merely 'consist of the Party meeting itself under another name.'¹⁴⁴

There is no doubt that the merging of the MPDCs with the LAI had a deleterious effect upon finances - a Political Bureau meeting held on October 1st, 1931, reported a substantial fall in the amount raised,¹⁴⁵ but the isolationist policy was having wider repercussions. By January 1930, Pollitt was reporting the virtual collapse of the Party's Colonial and Industrial Departments - a consequence of those in charge having to direct

¹⁴⁰ Minutes of a CPGB Central Committee Meeting, 31-5-30, Reel 1, (CPGBA).

¹⁴¹ Minutes of a CPGB Central Committee Meeting, 31-5-30, Reel 1, (CPGBA).

¹⁴² Annual Report of LAI's British Section, February 1931, op.cit.

¹⁴³ Minutes of a Meeting of the CPGB's Political Bureau, Reel 11, 17-6-30, (CPGBA).

¹⁴⁴ Minutes of a Meeting of the CPGB's Central Committee, 5-4-30, Reel 1, (CPGBA).

¹⁴⁵ Minutes of a Meeting of the GPGB's Political Bureau, 1-10-31, Reel 12, (CPGBA).

their attentions towards the *Daily Worker*, which was suffering from falling circulation figures and a precarious financial situation.¹⁴⁶

In India, confusion reigned within the Communist camp - its leaders imprisoned and its policies overturned just as the INC's great Civil Disobedience Campaign of 1930 was taking off.¹⁴⁷ The result was isolation from mainstream political activity at a crucial moment in India's political development. The prisoners were obliged to watch as the organisational base they had worked to build began to crumble away. The Central MDC was wound up several months after the trial's conclusion, its central defence fund in debt¹⁴⁸ and most of the Committee, including Nehru, gaoled for their activities in the Civil Disobedience Campaign.¹⁴⁹

Faced with a number of uncoordinated district CPs, the Comintern refused to recognise any one over the others,¹⁵⁰ but responded to appeals from the gaoled Communist leaders by sending a number of emissaries to try and salvage the operation. At this time the British CP had no cadres ready to send;¹⁵¹ J.T. Murphy had complained as early as May 1930 that the CPGB was too passive on the question of training members to work in India, urging that 'The Colonial Department should seriously consider the question of a school in London to train people to specialise on the colonial question.'¹⁵² Consequently, those sent were mostly American Communists who made little impact, although one

¹⁴⁶ Minutes of Meetings of the CPGB's Political Bureau, 9-1-30, 11-1-30, Reel 11, (CPGBA).

¹⁴⁷ On the 12th March, 1930, Gandhi began a campaign of non-cooperation during which peasants refused to pay rent or taxes. The Government responded by introducing a number of Ordinances - the INC was banned in June, sixty-seven national newspapers were shut down and mass arrests ensued, including Gandhi and Subhas Bose. Hundreds were killed or wounded. In one incident, two Hindu platoons of the Second Battalion of the Garwhali Rifles refused to fire on a Muslim crowd, forcing a military and police withdrawal. For the authorities, a disturbing example of Indian unity.

¹⁴⁸ Letter, Bridgeman to Bradley, 1-7-32, (BBP); H.N. Brailsford, 1931, op.cit., p.65.

¹⁴⁹ J. Nehru, *Jawaharal Nehru: an autobiography*, The Bodley Head, London, 1936, p.189.

¹⁵⁰ In the mid-1930s, a Young Workers' League was established by the Communists S.V. Deshpande and B.T. Ranadive, and immediately laid claim to being the official CPI. The organisation made little headway and in 1932, Ranadive and his supporters broke away. At the end of 1933, Bradley and Dr. Gangadhar Adhikari worked to stabilize the Party, and in 1934, the Deshpande and Ranadive groups were reconciled. S. Joshi, op.cit., pp.318-9.

¹⁵¹ Minutes of a Central Committee Meeting, 12-1-30, Reel 1, (CPGBA).

¹⁵² Minutes of a Political Bureau Meeting, 10-5-30, Reel 11, (CPGBA).

agent, Amir Haider Khan, who posed as a seaman until his arrest and imprisonment in May 1932, did make some headway.¹⁵³ In despair, the prisoners complained to Moscow and requested that only British citizens be used in the future.

By 1933 the authorities¹⁵⁴ believed that they had defused the threat from the Communists who were 'not a danger at the present moment'.¹⁵⁵ The so-called Round Table Talks - talks which Page Arnot dismissed as resembling 'the ceremonial mumblings of the priest that walks behind the hangman'¹⁵⁶ - had led to the Gandhi-Irwin Pact of 1931 and the end of the Civil Disobedience Campaign.¹⁵⁷ In a climate of growing self-confidence, the Mill owners began a new offensive against wages and conditions through a speeding-up of the production process, this time picking off mills individually. A dispirited Bradley wrote to his brother in December 1933, that Indian trade union organisation was in a 'state of chaos' and that not a single mill workers' union was 'worthy of the name'.¹⁵⁸

Confidence by the authorities that they had neutralised the Communist threat was reflected in the result of the Meerut prisoners' Appeal. On July 24th 1933, following an eight-day Appeal Hearing at Allahabad High Court, the Judges confirmed the findings of the Meerut trial, but dramatically reduced the sentences. Nine prisoners, including P.C. Joshi, Gopal Basak, Shakshul Huda and Dr. Adhikari, were released immediately. Muzaffar Ahmad's severe sentence was reduced to three years, Spratt's prison term was cut to two years and Bradley's to one year. In the event, all of the Meerut prisoners had gained their freedom by the autumn of 1935.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵³ S.R. Chowdhuri, op.cit., p.100.

¹⁵⁴ Sir Samuel Hoare had taken over the India Office in 1932 and Lord Willingdon was Viceroy.

¹⁵⁵ S. Roy, op.cit., p.165.

¹⁵⁶ Labour Monthly, September 1930, p.534.

¹⁵⁷ The INC was legalised in May 1934.

¹⁵⁸ Letter, Bradley to Len Bradley, 11-12-33, (BBP).

¹⁵⁹ The Leader, 6-8-33, (BBP).

Conclusion

By 1928, British Communists and their Indian comrades had made startling progress in their task of organising the Indian workforce in a number of key industries, so much so that voices within the Indian authorities were warning that they were on the brink of gaining control of the entire trade union movement. The greatest threat however, lay with a possible alignment of Communists and radical nationalists - a scenario which seemed to have substance, given Nehru's sympathetic approach to Communist ideas. In order to defuse this threat, it was considered necessary to isolate the Communists and expose their true motives which, it was believed, would prove to conflict with those of the nationalists. After due reflection, the Meerut Trial was the method which the authorities used in an attempt to achieve this end.

As a strategy, the arrest and trial of those leading the labour unrest backfired badly. The Indian Government misjudged the political mood of the INC, which issued protests at what it deemed to be attacks on ordinary Indian trade unionists. The trial itself gave the Communist accused an excellent opportunity to put forward their ideas with maximum publicity, as well as schooling the other defendants in Marxist-Leninist theory. As the trial unfolded, the Communists were allowed to cast themselves in the role of revolutionary heroes and the draconian sentences only served to reinforce this image.

In Britain, the Meerut Prisoners' cause won many important allies from a far wider constituency than the Communist and Labour left. This did not include the leadership of the labour movement, which initially treated the issue as a defensive action against Communist incursion, but there is evidence of widespread grass-roots support for the campaign in the trade unions. The CPGB was able to make full use of the issue of trade union repression in India and, by early 1933, pressure from the rank and file persuaded the Labour leadership to back the calls for action on the case.

Although the arrest of its leaders was a serious setback for the Indian Communist movement, longer-term damage resulted from the Comintern's isolationist policies after 1928. The decision to turn on the Congress left was opposed by the majority of British Communists, who adhered to their belief in co-operation with radical colonial nationalists as a further means of contact with the masses, but the Communist International refused to tolerate any diversity of opinion. As a result, Communists were excluded from the great popular upsurge of opposition to the colonial power led by the nationalists and were powerless to halt the disintegration of their base in the trade union movement. In Britain, moves to squeeze out non-Communists from the Meerut Committees seriously hampered the progress of the campaign.

The importance of the Meerut campaign for the Comintern and the CPGB was emphasised by Robin Page Arnot in 1930. It was 'the focus of the Indian revolution and the Indian revolution is the storm centre of the whole world revolution at this moment.'¹⁶⁰ There is no doubting the impact that the trial had on opinion in India and on the left in Britain. The work of the British Communists was greatly valued by the Indian workers and is remembered in some circles even today. Rajani Palme Dutt, describing his fiftieth birthday party held during a visit to India in summer 1946 wrote that amongst his guests were 'grizzled old veterans of the Bombay workers who remembered the days of Ben Bradley and were full of fire and animation',¹⁶¹

The progress of Communism in India was a cause of great concern to the authorities in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Between 1920 and 1934, the colonial police published three books on Communist activities and circulated them to the lower ranks of the civil service in an effort to inculcate anti-Communist attitudes. The potential existed at this time for great Communist advance but the inability of the leadership of the Communist movement to adopt a flexible attitude in response to diverse national conditions, or to

¹⁶⁰ Reel 1, CCMM, 12-1-30, (CPGBA).

¹⁶¹ J. Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., p.226.

accept advice from those directly involved, severely weakened the offensive. Bhagwan Josh claims that 'Given the correct strategy and conditions prevailing in India, the Communists and Socialists along with the militant nationalists had every chance to become a powerful force, if not the dominant force in national life'.¹⁶²

¹⁶² Bhagwan Josh, Struggle for Hegemony in India 1920-1947, Vol. II, 1934-1941, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 1992, p.114.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE INDIAN STRUGGLE 1933-39

Indian Communists Regroup

If the effect of the Government of India's offensive against Communists and their allies at the end of the 1920s was to temporarily behead the Indian Communist movement, the policy changes imposed by the Comintern during the 'third period' threatened to halt its advance altogether. Yet, between 1933 and the outbreak of the Second World War, Communist ideas played an important part in shaping the vision of a future, independent India which was nurtured and promoted by Nehru. That he continued to identify with such ideas despite the Communist movement's disparagement of his position throughout its ultra-left phase and its relative neglect of the Indian liberation struggle thereafter, was in some measure reflected in his close relations with the leaders of the CPGB.

Following the decision of the Seventh Comintern Congress to prioritise the struggle against the fascist threat in Europe, the Communist International was vulnerable to accusations of neglecting Indian concerns and even of subordinating the colonial revolution in order to placate those imperialist powers now considered to be potential allies of the Soviet Union. Undeniably, Moscow was preoccupied by the situation in Europe at this time and this had inevitable repercussions for the Comintern, which had increasingly operated as an expression of Stalin's foreign policy since the Sixth World Congress.

However, the relatively low priority accorded to colonial work at the centre by the mid-1930s ensured that responsibility for liaison with the CPI lay even more under the day-to-day control of the CPGB and its Indian specialists, Dutt and Bradley. Malcolm MacEwan claims that, 'neither the Party nor the *Daily Worker* deferred to the Soviet Union on Colonial or Indian matters, for the simple reason that we knew far more than they did.'¹

¹ Malcolm MacEwan, The Greening of a Red, Pluto Press, London, 1991, p.114.

Although this exaggerates the autonomy of the British Party, the CPGB and Dutt in particular, endeavoured to steer the intractable Indian Communists through the policy labyrinth constructed by Moscow while continuing to demonstrate a strong commitment to the cause of Indian freedom.

Gandhi, who favoured an 'honourable compromise' with the British Government, had suspended Civil Disobedience on 8th May 1933, a decision which Nehru condemned from his prison cell. 'I am', he wrote, 'afraid I am drifting further and further away from him (Gandhi) mentally . . . what a tremendous contrast to the dialectics of Lenin and Co. More and more I feel drawn to their dialectics'.² His words heralded a period of contention between the Congress left, of which he and Subhas Bose were leading figures, and the organisation's right-wing, during which the Congress Socialist Party (CSP) was formed. This was the significant development of 1934 in that the left had, for the first time, formed an organised group within Congress which argued from a class perspective and called on the INC to support the economic struggles of the workers and peasants.

As the mass protest movement was curtailed, paradoxically, Communist activity revived. Following the release of the Meerut prisoners, moves began to re-establish the Party, a process in which Bradley - who gained his freedom in November 1933 - played a leading role. Activities commenced with a conference, held in Calcutta in December 1933, during which a new statute was adopted and a Central Committee formed, with Doctor Gangadhar Adhikari elected to the post of General Secretary. This body was subsequently recognised by the Comintern as the official Communist Party of India.

Throughout 1934, Indian Communists were involved in a number of spontaneous strikes which erupted in the textile industry. Under the anti-imperialist united front - an aspect of popular front policy - co-operation with bourgeois nationalists and non-Communists was

² Quoted in Bhagwan Josh, The Struggle for Hegemony in India 1920-1947, Vol. 2 1934-41, Sage Publications, London, 1992, p.81.

no longer frowned upon, allowing for the formation of a Joint Council of Action from the followers of M.N. Roy, N.M Joshi and the CPI. The aims of this alliance, to co-ordinate working-class action and launch a general strike in the mills, seemed achievable when, on April 23rd, 90,000 textile workers in Bombay downed tools.³ It was a development to which the authorities reacted swiftly; the strike leaders were arrested and Communist literature was seized.

Prior to 1934, action against Communism was conducted mainly by the Intelligence Bureau in New Delhi. But with the prospect of renewed collaboration between Communists and nationalists, the main body of the police force in Bombay was utilised⁴ as the Government, determined to learn the lesson of Meerut, adopted a pre-emptive strategy of repression. On July 28th 1934, the CPI and its constituent branches and committees were declared unlawful bodies under the Criminal Law Amendment Act of 1908, the terms of which rendered all the party's monies, securities and credits liable to forfeit.⁵ Although this created obvious problems for the CPI, it was not a totally successful tactic, as many Communist organisations managed to avoid sanctions by various manoeuvres, such as a simple change of designation.

By 1935 the Communists had regained their position in the AITUC which, together with the Bombay textile mills, was the main power base of the CPI. Even the authorities admitted that, despite their repression and imprisonment, the Communists were able to 'integrate themselves with the workers in a remarkably short span of time'⁶ once they were released, and were instrumental in the increasing number of disputes in the period leading up to the Second World War.

³ Ibid., p.121.

⁴ Sir Percival Griffiths, *op.cit.*, pp.353-360.

⁵ Report of the LAI's British section, November 24-25th, 1934; S. Roy, *op.cit.*, Home Dept., notification no.F/7/8/34, dated 23-7-34.

⁶ Quoted in Bhagwan Josh, 1992, *op.cit.*, p.113.

Whilst practising co-operation with Congress, Indian Communists were required to simultaneously build an independent base. Throughout the second half of the 1930s the CPI, despite being forced to operate underground, made great progress in organising agricultural workers and poor peasants into Kisan Sabha, or peasants' unions, which were involved in numerous rent strikes and riots.⁷ Their success in organising the rural population was due in part to championing local causes. But it was also related to the association of landlords in some districts with the INC. There was a reluctance among the rural poor in some areas to join forces with their immediate exploiters and the nationalist cause could seem abstract for those for whom the British administration remained too remote to be identified as the common enemy. Nehru acknowledged this fact when he admitted that, in some areas, the peasantry did not 'find the same field within Congress',⁸ as it did within the Communist movement.

The Dutt-Bradley Theses

The drastic policy change represented by the popular front against fascism presented real problems for Indian Communists who were in effect being instructed to execute another 'U' turn. Because the two CPI delegates to the Seventh Congress of the Comintern, S.V. Deshpande and S.S. Mirajkar, were arrested in Singapore on their way to Moscow,⁹ the task of explaining the implications of the new policy to Indian Communists was passed to the CPGB. More specifically, the undertaking was assigned to Bradley - now regarded as a specialist on colonial questions because of his practical experience - and Rajani Palme Dutt.

The Dutt-Bradley Theses, as this interpretation became known, was printed in *Inprecorr* in February 1936.¹⁰ It was an essentially pragmatic presentation, calling for all anti-imperialist forces to join together in an all-India United People's Front, which

⁷ The All-India Kisan Sabha was formed in 1936, reaching a membership of 800,000 by 1939. See The Revolution in India, Tait Memorial Committee, Edinburgh, n.d.

⁸ Minutes of a Central Committee Meeting, 1-2nd July, 1938, Reel 9. (CPGBA).

⁹ S.R. Chowdhuri, 1977, op.cit., p.103.

¹⁰ 'The Anti-Imperialist People's Front' in Inprecorr, Vol. 16, 29th February, 1936.

acknowledged the hegemonic position of the INC in relation to the masses. The Congress left was rehabilitated, allowing the Congress Socialist Party, which was established in October 1934, to be credited with the potential to become, 'the form of realisation of the anti-imperialist people's front'.¹¹

Nevertheless, the policy drew a distinction between the Congress hierarchy and its membership, arguing that it was possible to be a member of that organisation without being a dupe of its 'treacherous bourgeois leadership'. Although the people's front allowed the Communists to function as part of the broad left, this did not signify that they had renounced their ambitions to power. In fact, the objective was to participate in order to expose and ultimately displace the 'counter-revolutionary' leadership - a strategy which caused dissent among the 1934 strike committee and led to the defeat of the general strike.

It was this dichotomy of purpose which caused relations between the CSP and Indian Communists to cool. Shortly after its formation in 1934, the CSP had agreed to permit Communists to hold membership - an alliance which was discussed the following year at the Seventh Comintern Congress in a meeting between Palme Dutt, Harry Pollitt, Ben Bradley and M. R. Masani of the CSP.¹² Dutt and Bradley had directed their exposition of the new policy at the non-Communist left through a letter entitled, 'An Open Letter to Indian Patriots', which was printed in the March 1936 edition of *The Congress Socialist*, organ of the CSP.¹³ But following the discovery in 1937 of a CPI document¹⁴ which revealed that Communists were merely using the organisation as a 'Trojan Horse', the relationship became strained. The break was not final however; although Communists

¹¹ Bhagwan Josh, 1992, op.cit., p.125. For more details of the Dutt-Bradley see: B. Chandra, 1983, op.cit., pp.180-182; S.R. Chowdhuri, 1977, op.cit., pp.102-112 and M.R. Masani, 1954, op.cit., pp.57-59.

¹² S.R. Chowdhuri, op.cit., p.161.

¹³ M.R. Masani, op.cit., p.59.

¹⁴ The document was entitled 'Plan of Work - CSP'.

were subsequently banned from joining the organisation, those already inside the CSP were allowed to remain as members.¹⁵

For leading Indian Communists such as P.C. Joshi, the new line presented a formidable challenge. Faced with the refusal of many Indian Communists to accept the changes, Party officials spent months summarising and translating policy reports into the numerous Indian dialects. Intensive discussions produced the view that the CPGB's interpretation, 'failed to distinguish the problems of the industrial workers in the West from those of the peasantry and unskilled workers in backward economies', and even that the advice of the two British Communists was 'particularly vacuous'.¹⁶

The anti-fascist rationale behind the new policy was resented as a shift away from the anti-imperialist struggle which was the Indian Communists' primary concern, while the apparent abandonment of revolutionary certitudes left many activists disordered and defiant. As late as March 1937, the Political Bureau of the CPI considered it necessary to issue a statement clarifying the Dutt-Bradley Theses in order to dispel confusion among the rank and file as to the class basis of the peoples' front.¹⁷ This statement warned against attempts to build a United National Front which excluded the national bourgeoisie; a ruling to which many in the CPI found difficulty conforming.

Despite the Party's apparent acceptance by 1938 that the INC was 'the central mass political organisation of the Indian people ranged against imperialism',¹⁸ the question of leadership of the peoples' front continued to be one of contention. For example, many were unsure at which point the national bourgeoisie were to be shed from the struggle. Such uncertainties were to cause prolonged internicine strife within the CPI and great problems for its supervisors in the British Communist Party. One manifestation of the

¹⁵ See Bhagwan Josh, 1992, op.cit., pp.140-141.

¹⁶ M. Carritt, op.cit., p.164.

¹⁷ Bhagwan Josh, 'Nationalism, Third International and Indian Communism', in Bipan Chandra (ed.), The Indian Left - critical appraisals, Vikas Publishing House Ltd., New Delhi, 1983, p.195.

¹⁸ Quoted in Bipan Chandra, 1989, op.cit., p.304.

Indian Party's confusion was its support in 1939 of Subhas Chandra Bose's candidature for a second term as Congress President, despite evidence of his fascist sympathies.

In January 1938, whilst presiding over a reception held for Bose in London, Dutt had listened to Bose proclaim that; 'our struggle against imperialism and fascism in India is a struggle not only for our own salvation, but for the salvation of humanity', and concluded that he had uttered 'inspiring words for all of us'.¹⁹ Bose later remarked of this visit to Britain; 'I am greatly encouraged by the attitude of the leaders of the British Communist Party, whose general policy with regard to India seems to me to be in keeping with the INC'.²⁰ However, by March the following year, Pollitt was expressing concern that the CPGB was mistaken to form a bloc with Bose, who was 'an enemy of everything that the Communist Party stands for'.²¹

Prior to the outbreak of war, Bose founded the Berlin-based, anti-British, Indian Students Association with the aid of the German Foreign Office, and he continued to collaborate with the German regime using his 'Forward Bloc' organisation.²² His 1939 election programme,²³ which issued an ultimatum on independence to the British Government, split Congress opinion and precipitated the resignations of more than a dozen members of the Working Committee, including Nehru.

The zeal with which the CPI subscribed to any attempt to disrupt the Congress leadership caused great concern within the British Party. Dutt warned of the danger of fascist penetration in India, reminding colleagues that Bose had shown signs of reflecting the

¹⁹ *Colonial Information Bulletin*, No.19, 15-1-38, p.4.

²⁰ *Colonial Information Bulletin*, No. 22, 1st. March, 1938, p.2.

²¹ Minutes of a Central Committee Meeting, 19-3-39, Reel 10, (CPGBA).

²² *The Forward Bloc*, formed in May 1939, with Bose as president, was pledged to overthrow the British authorities which declared the organisation illegal in June 1942. Bose was arrested following the outbreak of war, but escaped to Germany in 1941, where he helped establish a Central free India Bureau. See Percival Griffiths, *op.cit.*, p.368.

²³ Opposition to Bose's programme led to a resurgence of the right at the Triparti Congress. His 'Forward Bloc' organised a number of All-India demonstrations which rapidly developed into anti-Congress leadership rallies, prompting Nehru to publish a condemnation in the press. See H. Pollitt, Political Bureau Report to the CPGB's Central Committee, 23-7-39, Reel 10, (CPGBA).

tendency to regard fascism as 'Britain's enemy, therefore our friend',²⁴ while Bradley warned against 'disruptive elements on the left',²⁵ emphasising the danger to the unity of the nationalist movement posed by a ill-timed, Communist-inspired, leadership bid. According to the CPGB, the Indian comrades tended to overestimate their successes, believing that they had no need of any other organisation in the building of Socialism in India. It was a position, British Communists complained, which had 'alienated some very good elements in the Congress Socialist Party'.²⁶

The CPGB was committed to a policy of 'Socialist Unity' in India and well aware of the value of the CSP in providing Communists with a respected platform. The Party's fifteenth National Congress welcomed the 'growing unity of the people of India behind the INC, and the strengthening of the mass movement of workers and peasants'.²⁷ In pleading for a more conciliatory approach by Indian Communists, Dutt warned against 'a sectarian tendency in Socialism in India, a tendency . . . to aim . . . at a restricted selected membership'.²⁸ The message was even clearer in a statement to the British Party in March 1939; 'we want them (CPI) to drop this notion that they are a ready-made Communist Party ready to go into a broad movement in order to manipulate and manoeuvre inside it'.²⁹

A Meeting of Minds?

With the adoption of the new line, Nehru in particular became once more the focus of Communist aspirations, as it was believed that he possessed the ability to lead Congress away from Gandhi's influence and towards the left. However, the sensitivity of Nehru's position as a Congress leader required the CPGB to camouflage its attempts at

²⁴ Minutes of a Central Committee Meeting, 19-3-39, Reel 10, (CPGBA).

²⁵ Quoted in J. Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., p.161.

²⁶ Minutes of a Central Committee Meeting, 19-3-39, Reel 10, (CPGBA).

²⁷ Colonial Information Bulletin, No.11, 30th. September, 1938, p.2.

²⁸ Minutes of a Central Committee Meeting, 1-2-38, Reel 9, (CPGBA).

²⁹ Minutes of a Central Committee Meeting, 19-3-39, Reel 10, (CPGBA). Despite their resistance, the majority of Indian communists eventually accepted the revised position, including the criticism that the CPI had been guilty of 'sectarianism' during the years that it had followed the edicts of the sixth Comintern Congress!

proselytism. For example, in 1936, just weeks after Nehru was elected to the Presidency of the INC, he and Dutt met in Lausanne. According to Dutt, this meeting was purely fortuitous. He claimed to be visiting Bradley who, he alleged, was receiving treatment at the same clinic as Nehru's wife, Kamala.³⁰ But the falsity of this account is revealed by a letter from Harry Pollitt to Victor Gollancz which asserts that Dutt had been sent to Lausanne specifically to rendezvous with Nehru.³¹

During this encounter, the two held extensive talks and reached agreement on a range of issues including the need to promote the left within Congress, to consider the economic and social claims of the masses and, in line with a demand for full independence, the rejection of the 1935 Constitution.³² In the provisions of this document, a product of the Simon Commission, the British Government was attempting to defuse the nationalists' message by broadening the base of British rule.³³

Nehru and the CSP, anxious to reject any move by Congress towards constitutionalism, were adamant that the Congress leadership should not accept ministerial office under the terms of the constitution. They feared that such a move would inevitably lead to co-operation with British imperialism. Communists, however, were critical of the CSP's non-acceptance policy. Calling for militant mass action, they claimed that the elections could be transformed into 'large scale anti-imperialist mass mobilisation'.³⁴ Whilst believing that the 'slave constitution' was a democratic cloak to hide autocratic British

³⁰ S. Gopal, op.cit., pp.108-9.

³¹ R.D. Edwards, Victor Gollancz: a biography, V. Gollancz Ltd., London, 1987, p.234; John Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., pp.156-7.

³² John Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., pp.157-9.

³³ The provisions enfranchised approximately twelve percent of the population, enabling this small minority to elect representatives to Provincial Legislatures, which in turn elected members to a Federal Legislature. Critics claimed that the Act would bolster reactionary forces and exploit divisions in Indian society; for example, Muslims were allocated proportionately more seats than Hindus and the 'untouchables' were set apart from the rest of the population. The so-called autonomous provinces would be presided over by a Governor with virtual dictatorship powers, while the office of Governor-General would retain the existing wide powers with which to carry out its 'special responsibilities'.

³⁴ B. Josh, 1992, op.cit., p.181.

rule, they argued that the left should support the Congress right's bid for office and, once accepted, should expose their reformism and eject them through mass action.

During their 1936 meeting, Dutt had a 'long argument' with Nehru over the issue³⁵ and, in the event, his advice proved to be sound. Despite the nationalists' opposition to these provisions, the 1937 elections brought remarkable victories for the INC, which succeeded in establishing Congress administrations in seven of the eleven provinces and coalition governments in two others. The Muslim League, whose claim to be the main representative of Muslim opinion was upheld by the British, won only one in twenty of the seats set aside for Muslims in specifically communal constituencies.³⁶

The formation of the Congress Governments generated a new sense of confidence among the workers and peasants and led to a surge in activism. Nehru confirmed this in a speech to the INC's Calcutta session in October 1937. 'My personal view was against office acceptance', he admitted, but 'office acceptance has benefited us. The country is pulsating with a new life and new vision.'³⁷ During 1938, 647,000 workers, whose leaders had been released from gaol by the new nationalist administrations, took part in some four hundred strikes.³⁸

In his first Presidential address at the Lucknow Congress of 1936, and later that same year at the Faizapur Congress, Nehru delighted British Communists by calling for the establishment of socialism in India and promoting an internationalist ethos which was pro-Soviet and anti-fascist. Described by Dutt as 'having a clear international viewpoint on the unity of the national struggle with the international democratic movement',³⁹ the

³⁵ Minutes of a Central Committee Meeting, 19-3-39, Reel 10, (CPGBA).

³⁶ H. Palmer, India, Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., August 1942; Dorothy Hewitt, Truth About India, London, n.d..

³⁷ Quoted in B. Josh, 1992, op.cit., p.277.

³⁸ India's Demand for Freedom, Lawrence and Wishart, London, n.d., c1942, p.13.

³⁹ Minutes of a Central Committee Meeting, 19-3-39, Reel 10, (CPGBA).

Congress leader retained little faith in the ability of capitalism or parliamentary democracy to solve India's problems ⁴

In contrast Soviet Russia, seemingly untouched by the West's economic crisis as she implemented the Five Year Plan, and socialism seemed to provide the answer. He wrote that 'A study of Marx and Lenin provided a powerful effect on my mind and helped me to see history and current affairs in a new light. The long chain of history and of social development appeared to have some meaning, some significance and future lost most of its obscurity.'⁴¹ It soon became apparant, however, that such tendencies would be constrained by Nehru's less radical colleagues, who constituted a majority on the Congress working committee. With Gandhi's support, they succeeded in frustrating all Nehru's efforts to move the organisation to the left.

Nevertheless, his continuing empathy with the Communists was apparant when he chaired a Conference on Peace and Empire in London in July 1938,⁴² during which Dutt extended a warm welcome and Paul Robeson expressed the sympathy of Negro Americans towards India's struggle for self-determination.⁴³ It led to his addressing a Central Committee meeting of the CPGB in July 1938, an exceptional event - not even left-wing Socialists like Fenner Brockway were invited to do so - which indicates how close Nehru was to Communists at this time. Here he declared that, 'it is very desirable and necessary for this unity of the two movements (the CSP and the Communists) to be maintained . . . and it is within that framework, therefore, that I try to think.'⁴⁴

All the signs point to Nehru's Marxist convictions, his admiration for Soviet achievements and his readiness to listen to old friends in the Communist movement such as Dutt and

⁴⁰ He was particularly affected by the economic Depression of 1929-33 and the rise of fascism in Europe.

⁴¹ Quoted in L.P. Singha, 'Marxism and Nehru's Concept of Socialism', in Political Science Review, Vol. 12, Part 314, 1973, p.221.

⁴² Stafford Cripps gave the opening address at this Conference.

⁴³ Colonial Information Bulletin, No.5, 1st. July, 1938, p.1; Conference on Peace and Empire, 15/16-7-38, DBN27/5, (RBP).

⁴⁴ Minutes of a Central Committee Meeting, 1-2nd July, 1938, Reel 9, (CPGBA).

Chattopadhyaya, with both of whom he maintained a long-standing correspondence. But, as Dutt recognised, Nehru was 'essentially a representative of the centre',⁴⁵ whose left sympathies would always be subordinate to nationalist unity. Ultimately, he preferred to work alongside Gandhi, the leader who had delivered a mass base for nationalism, rather than the communists, who merely sought a mass base for Socialism.

India Today

The more relaxed climate engendered by the popular front enabled Dutt to develop his work on India, the results of which were set out in *India Today*, published in 1940. In this, he argued that India was undergoing a process of de-industrialisation - a reversal of his earlier rapid industrialisation theory. Citing the wealth of the country prior to British rule and its trade in silks, cotton, sugar, indigo and other commodities, he maintained that the basic conditions existed for the establishment of a modern industrial economy. But, while constructing the means of a 'unified system of exploitation' on the ruins of the old economy, imperialism had 'retarded the economic development of India'.⁴⁶

The view that India's industrial development was being neglected or deliberately held back in order to protect British capitalism from Indian competition was in line with the nationalist view. Nationalists also complained of the lack of industrialisation in India, claiming after 1939 that any progress was restricted to existing industries and those set up for war requirements. Furthermore, the advocacy of a planned economy as a means of achieving social and economic reconstruction in an independent India was broadly in line with the views of Nehru and the Congress left.

The overall impression of *India Today* was an optimistic one. Divisions in Indian society were a special product of the latest period of British rule, or 'of the declining imperialist

⁴⁵ Quoted in J. Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., p.157.

⁴⁶ Rajani Palme Dutt, *India Today*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1940, p.37. However, the more pragmatic approach of the communists was implicit in the assertion that, 'We should not let people run away with the idea that our constructive policy can be summed up in the slogan, 'Smash the Empire'.

ascendency'⁴⁷ according to Dutt. He claimed that communal antagonisms should not be seen as part of the consciousness of the masses, but were rooted in inequalities and could be overcome by social and economic advances. Socialism was perceived to be in the ascendent within the INC and problems arising from the inter-relation of the national struggle with the class and social struggle could be solved, 'given unity of all the decisive forces of the people in the common aim of the national struggle against the common enemy, imperialism.'⁴⁸ But whilst asserting that 'Of the outcome of this struggle there can be no doubt, the defeat of the black forces is bound up with the victory of the national democratic liberation of India',⁴⁹ he warned that a united, classless society could not be achieved in one step - Socialism did not necessarily represent the immediate next stage in India.⁵⁰

Conclusion

The isolation of Indian Communists during the ultra-left 'third period' constituted a severe setback for the movement, severing its connections with the masses at the beginning of a great wave of national consciousness and provoking dissension within its own ranks.

There are those who argue that the strategy also affected the internal politics of the INC. Jayaprakash Narayan, president of the CSP, argued that if the Communists had not shunned the nationalist movement on the eve of the civil disobedience campaign in 1929, 'the radicalisation of Congress would have gone much further.'⁵¹

But despite the problems generated during 1928-1935, Communism in India survived to make its mark in the latter half of the 1930s. Many of the nationalists who were of a left persuasion continued to maintain links with Communists and Nehru in particular proved a durable ally, 1936-45 being his most radical phase. The CPGB worked to retain the goodwill of the Congress left, often in the face of CPI resistance. Palme Dutt kept in

⁴⁷ Ibid, p.406

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.536

⁴⁹ Ibid, p.423

⁵⁰ Ibid, p.529

⁵¹ Quoted in Bhagwan Josh, 1992, op.cit., p.137.

close personal touch with Nehru and seems to have been genuinely enthusiastic about united front work between Communists and nationalists. Certainly, Dutt's writings on the Indian struggle were far less copious during the ultra-left phase of 1928-35 than they were either before or after it and we have seen that the majority of the CPGB leadership vociferously opposed the sectarian turn in the first place. Once the Popular Front policy permitted a return to the original alliance strategy, Dutt was able to produce some of his best analyses of the Indian struggle, including *India Today* (1940).

CHAPTER FIVE: THE ANTI-IMPERIALIST NETWORK

Empire Socialism

During the inter-war years, the doctrine of 'trusteeship' was employed by the Labour Party to justify the continued existence of the colonial Empire. This stressed Britain's responsibilities towards her colonies and the peoples over whom she ruled. The principle of 'sacred trust' was enshrined in the League of Nations Covenant and applied through the League's permanent Mandates Commission, established to oversee the administration of subject territories. In 1918, the Party referred in its new Constitution to the 'moral claims upon us of the non-adult races', and pledged to support democratic self-government only for those territories which, in its judgement, were capable of self-rule.¹

The ILP had always provided those voices calling for a 'Socialist foreign policy' within the Labour Party. Resolutions on imperialism were passed at its Annual Conferences in 1920, 1921 and 1922² and, by the mid-1920s, leading figures on the left were attempting to formulate a distinctive policy towards the colonies. It was during this period that the Party gravitated towards the Communist position, in that it identified a direct link between British unemployment and cheap imports from the colonial Empire. The CPGB's stance on this issue was outlined in a resolution to the 1925 TUC Conference, which stated that British imperialism functioned to 'exploit cheap and unorganised labour and to use the competition of that labour to degrade the workers' standards in Great Britain'.³ The ILP echoed these views, but in other respects the colonial policies of the two parties diverged until the ILP's shift to the Left in 1932.

¹ 'Labour and the New Social Order', Report of the Labour Party Conference, 1918, p.22, (LPA).

² Reports of ILP Conferences, 1920, 1921 and 1922, (LPA).

³ The resolution, on the right of colonial peoples to self-determination, was proposed by A.A. Purcell of the Furnishing Trades Association, seconded by CPGB member Harry Pollitt for the Boilermakers Union and passed with a substantial majority. See Report of the 57th Annual TUC Conference, Scarborough, 1925, pp.553-555.

In 1925, the Labour Party's Advisory Committee on Imperial Affairs⁴ put the case for a Socialist Commonwealth of self-governing states. George Lansbury argued that the imminent political dominance of the workers placed upon them the responsibility of constructing 'a new idea of International relationships' based on the common good. 'Our duty', he wrote, 'is to transform the British Empire of Domination into a Commonwealth of free nations', within which 'production, distribution, and exchange of goods shall be organised for and on behalf of the community.'⁵ This, according to Dutt, was 'a crass example'⁶ of confused reasoning. He dismissed the idea of socialising the Empire as akin to socialising slavery and claimed that the concept ignored the power relations upon which the Empire was built.

On the domestic front the ILP, applying a Hobsonian analysis, blamed domestic underconsumption for Britain's economic ills and advocated economic planning, social reforms and a national minimum wage as part of their *Living Wage* programme. Remedies included using the Empire as 'a bloc against world capitalism'⁷ - a view which led some to align themselves with Baldwin's Conservative Government on the issue of imperial preference in the summer of 1925.⁸ It was a strategy denounced by the CPGB as a 'desperate expedient', intended to 'retain the White colonies a little longer as a field for favourable investment for British capital, and induce the British workers to agree to the continued sweating of the slave colonies.'⁹ Dutt insisted that large capital and not the working-classes were the beneficiaries of imperial preference¹⁰ and declared the

⁴ In 1925, the colonial sub-committee of the Advisory Committee on International Affairs - the body from which much of Labour's thought on foreign and colonial policy originated - was reorganised into the Advisory Committee on Imperial Affairs.

⁵ George Lansbury, 'Empire Day', in Lansbury's Labour Weekly, May 23, 1925, p.5.

⁶ Maurice Spector, 'The Empire Labour Conference', in Labour Monthly, Vol. 7, No. 9, September 1925, p.550.

⁷ David Howell, A Lost Left, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1986, pp.261-262.

⁸ Even figures on the left endorsed this stance - Lansbury, for example, in his journal Lansbury's Labour Weekly, and Tom Johnson, editor of the Glasgow Forward. See S. MacIntyre, Autumn 1975, op.cit., p.16.

⁹ 'Editorial View', in The Communist Review, Vol. 6, No. 3, July 1925, p.109.

¹⁰ Rajani Palme Dutt, Empire Socialism, CPGB, London, 1925.

Chamberlainite programme of social imperialism and imperial federation to be 'the British form of Fascism'.¹¹

The ILP's advocacy of social reforms and wage increases was repudiated by Communists as ignoring realities, especially in the severe economic climate which prevailed prior to the 1926 General Strike. Dutt argued that capitalism was deliberately neglecting domestic industry in order to build up more profitable foreign and colonial industry which functioned in direct competition with its British counterparts. By peddling the false solution of reformism, the ILP was merely weakening the revolutionary development of the workers. Given this analysis, he argued, the *Living Wage* campaign should be just one aspect of a much wider workers' struggle.¹²

The ILP Moves Left

The impatience of the Labour left with its leadership's 'politics of gradualism' grew steadily throughout the late 1920s and early 1930s, heightened by its sensitivity to Communist claims that it functioned to protect the reformist leadership by operating as an impotent, left debating chamber. Such concerns manifested themselves in the ILPs growing desire for more radical policies as evinced by the 1928 Cook-Maxton Manifesto campaign and the demand for 'Socialism in our time'. Under these circumstances, the election of a second minority Labour Government in 1929 was almost certain to lead to ILP disappointment¹³ and, on 24th August, 1931, their worst fears were confirmed. Confronted by a deteriorating world economic situation, MacDonald dissolved his administration and, together Philip Snowden, J.H. Thomas and Lord Sankey, helped to create the Conservative-dominated National Government.

¹¹ R. Palme Dutt, 'The British Empire', in *Labour Monthly*, Vol. 5, No. 4, October 1923, p.215.

¹² Pajani Palme Dutt, *Socialism and the Living Wage*, CPGB, 1927.

¹³ On imperial issues, the Government found itself in trouble almost immediately. The ILP refused to support the Colonial Development Bill until an amendment submitted by Fenner Brockway, which included provisions for minimum wage levels and restrictions on the use of child labour, was adopted. See 23 House of Commons Debate, 5s, c864, 19-7-29.

As the Labour Party, now under Henderson's leadership, was perceived to have moved to the right, open rebellion took place within the ILP. Following a campaign for disaffiliation from the Labour Party by the Revolutionary Policy Committee (RPC),¹⁴ a decision was taken at a special ILP conference in June 1932 to initiate the break,¹⁵ while those elements on the left who resisted the call began to consolidated around the Socialist League (SL).¹⁶ One of the League's central demands was the adoption of a Socialist colonial policy¹⁷ - Frank Horrabin, editor of the organisation's journal *The Socialist League*, rejected the Labour vision of a 'Socialist Commonwealth', advocating instead a 'Workers' United States of Europe'.¹⁸

During the ultra-left period of 1928-1934, CPGB attacks upon the Labour left intensified. Harry Pollitt, in a debate with Brockway in 1932, accused the ILP of colluding in the exploitation of the colonial peoples, in contrast to the CPGB which stood for 'the complete independence of all colonial countries'.¹⁹ By the mid-1930s however, popular front tactics had led to a softening of criticism in the interests of anti-fascist unity (that is, collective defence of the USSR). It was a strategy justified by Hugo Rathbone when he wrote of a 'large body of opinion in the rank and file of even the Conservative, as well as

¹⁴ The RPC, a body of young, left-wing, working-class activists, was led by Dr. C.K. Cullen and solicitor Jack Gaster - son of a leading Rabbi.

¹⁵ Those in favour of disaffiliation cited the imminent collapse of capitalism and the low level of support for the Communists at that time to back their call for a reconstituted socialist party to take the political lead. By 1932, the CPGB's fortunes had reached a nadir - membership stood at its lowest ever level, Communist influence in the trade unions was declining and their share of the 1931 election vote reflected this position. The RPC believed it could replace the CPGB leadership, whom it regarded as 'bad manœuvrers', within the Comintern. See Minutes of a Political Bureau Meeting, 20-4-33, Reel 4, (CPA).

¹⁶ The SL was founded in 1932 through a merger of the National ILP Affiliation Committee and the Society for Socialist Inquiry and Propaganda (SSIP). Stafford Cripps became chair in 1933 and other prominent supporters included E.F. Wise, William Mellor, Sir Charles Trevelyan, J.T. Murphy - who left the CPGB in 1932 - H.N. Brailsford, Harold Laski, Ellen Wilkinson, Aneurin Bevan, G.R. Strauss and D.N. Pritt.

¹⁷ The League's militancy grew throughout the 1930s, bringing it into frequent conflict with the Labour leadership and giving rise to Cripps' resignation from the Party's N.E.C. in 1935. See Ben Pimlott, *Labour and the Left in the 1930s*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1977, p.49.

¹⁸ J.F. Horrabin, *Pamphlets*, No. 4, Socialist League, n.d.

¹⁹ *Which Way for the Workers?*, CPGB, London, 1932, p.5, p.9.

the Liberal and Labour, Party (sic)²⁰ who, while not prepared to recognise the right of colonies to secede, were now willing to join in protests against their exploitation and denial of elementary rights. This, he argued, was the beginning of a process of enlightenment as to the true nature of imperialism.²¹

British Communists now concentrated on attracting ILP members. As early as February of 1933, Dutt had informed his colleagues that a number of important proposals had been drawn up in an effort to win over sections of the Party.²² These overtures were greeted with mixed reactions; James McGovern declared it 'impossible and unthinkable' that the ILP would work with the Communists, while Maxton - so reviled during his chairmanship of the LAI - asked why his fellow members should be so afraid of this 'tiny, insignificant party'.²³ Maxton's support of the united front was an important prize to Communists; he was courted assiduously by Pollitt²⁴ and received a warm welcome when he attended the CPGB's thirteenth Congress. But the RPC continued to offer the CPGB its best hope of advancement with the ILP rank and file, and Communist members operating within the RPC were instructed to stay put and fight for the CP line.²⁵

During the summer of 1936, the ILP, the SL and the CPGB - which now believed that the bulk of the ILP membership, albeit with some 'unclearness and inconsistencies', accepted in principle the basis of Marxism-Leninism²⁶ - launched a Unity Campaign.²⁷ In contrast

²⁰ H. Rathbone, 'The Problem of African Independence', in Labour Monthly, Vol. 18, No. 4, April 1936, p.248.

²¹ As part of the rapprochement, Communists launched a campaign to affiliate with the Labour Party in 1935, but this period marked the advent of Stalin's show trials and Labour leaders, still smarting from earlier Communist advances in the labour movement through the use of 'united front from below' tactics, steered their Party's 1935 Conference to a rejection of both Communist affiliation and the popular front alliance.

²² Minutes of a Political Bureau Meeting, 16-2-33, Reel 4, (CPA).

²³ Minutes of a Political Bureau Meeting, 20-4-33, Reel 4, (CPA).

²⁴ Minutes of a Central Committee Meeting, 6-1-36, Reel 4, (CPA).

²⁵ Minutes of a Political Bureau Meeting, 20-4-33, (CPA). An agreement on united front co-operation between the CPGB and the ILP was finally reached in May 1933.

²⁶ R. Palme Dutt, For a United Communist Party, CPGB, 1935, p.3.

²⁷ A resolution of the Thirteenth CPGB Congress, 1935, proposed to the ILP the holding of a joint Congress for the formation of a United Communist Party. See *Ibid.*, p.1.

to the declining fortunes of the ILP,²⁸ which saw the campaign as an opportunity to renew its lost contact with the masses, the Communists' popularity was steadily rising at this time,²⁹ although the figures suggest that their cause still had a long way to go. For the CPGB, the aim of the campaign was to effect a defeat of the National Government and replace it with a popular front administration which would ally with Soviet Russia. At the outset, this uneasy alliance produced some notable achievements - the organisation of a massive Hunger March in the autumn of 1936, for example, and the halting of a march by Moseley's British Union of Fascists through London's East End. But, following Labour action against the SL, the campaign collapsed in the autumn of 1937.

During the 1930s an increasing number of writers and intellectuals were attracted to Marxist ideas. Neal Wood writes of a 'dazzling array of intellectual virtuosi'³⁰ who, 'influenced by the country's economic and social problems, the threat of fascism and the failure of Labour to respond effectively, turned to Communism in the 1930s.'³¹ The Spanish Civil War in particular had a radicalising effect and many of the country's most promising talents travelled to Spain to fight for the Republican cause. In the spring of 1936, the highly successful Left Book Club was established by Victor Gollancz,³² its aim being to promote the Communists' popular front initiative. The sympathetic view of *Communism promoted in these texts* was reinforced in Sir Stafford Cripps' *Tribune*³³ and in the pages of the *New Statesman* during this period.

²⁸ The ILP's membership had dropped from 16,773 in 1932 to 4,392 in 1935. See Barry Winter, *The ILP Past and Present*, ILP, Leeds, 1993.

²⁹ By 1939, the Party's membership had reached over 17,000, its highest recorded figure, and weekend sales of the *Daily Worker* topped 200,000. See Noreen Branson, op.cit., p.191.

³⁰ W.H. Auden, Christopher Isherwood, Stephen Spender, Naomi Mitchison, Hugh MacDiarmid and Cecil Day Lewis were all attracted by Communist ideas.

³¹ The politics of Edward Mosely lent credence to the accusations of 'social fascism' which Communists had levelled at the Party.

³² Membership of the Club rose rapidly to 57,000 and its titles, which mainly covered political and international affairs and the impact of fascism, were widely read. See Willie Thompson, *The Good Old Cause, British Communism 1920-1991*, Pluto Press, London, 1992, pp.55-6.

³³ *Tribune* was founded by Cripps in 1937.

On an economic level, the apparent success of Stalin's first five year plan which allegedly achieved full employment and modernisation of the Soviet economy, won praise from earlier critics such as the Webbs.³⁴ They interpreted the bureaucratic Soviet system as a model of the organised society run by experts to which they aspired, imbuing the order with an integrity and altruism which better fitted with their ideals than with Soviet reality. Their support, together with that of figures like the economist Professor Harold Laski, did much to popularise the cause of Communism.

Many on the non-Communist left were nudged towards a Leninist position on the issue of Empire-Commonwealth. In his essay, 'Not Counting Niggers', George Orwell criticised those who claimed to defend democracy against fascism whilst tolerating a far greater injustice - the British Empire. 'What we always forget', he wrote, 'is that the overwhelming bulk of the British proletariat does not live in Britain but in Asia and Africa. It is not in Hitler's power, for instance, to make a penny an hour the normal industrial wage; it is perfectly normal in India, and we are at great pains to keep it so'.³⁵

The irony of the situation was that as the Communist movement gathered itself for the looming battle against the forces of the far-right, it became vulnerable to claims that the ILP - now embracing aspects of Lenin's theory of imperialism - was 'well to the left of the Communists at that time'.³⁶ A conference called by the India League and London Federation of Peace Councils on 16th. July, 1938, debated whether the CP policy of giving priority to anti-fascism in order to strengthen the world democratic front or the ILP proposition that 'imperialism is as much a menace to peace and liberty as are the Fascist

³⁴ They praised the system in their two-volume work, Soviet Communism: a New Civilisation Neal Wood, op.cit., pp.44-5.

³⁵ S. Orwell and I. Angus (eds.), The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell, Vol.1, Penguin, London, 1970, p.437.

³⁶ Reginald Reynolds, My Life and Crimes, Jarrolds Publishers Ltd., London, 1956, p.116. By the end of the 1930s, ILP policy aspired to 'a classless society in which all economic resources would be communally owned and controlled. The power to live by rent, interest or profit would be ended and all would perform work of social value according to their need'. The Socialist Challenge to Poverty, Fascism, War, ILP, London, n.d., c. early 1940's.

Powers',³⁷ was the way forward for colonial workers. Six hundred delegates, including representatives of the IASB and forty-five ILP members, listened to speakers who included Ras Makonnen for the ILP. At the conclusion of the debate, 'most of the delegates from the colonial workers' organisations' supported ILP criticism of the French Popular Front, and around a quarter of those present agreed with the ILP's position.³⁸

In 1938, George Padmore described the ILP as 'the only working-class party in Britain that has a correct theoretical approach on questions of imperialist war and the colonies.'³⁹ In fact, despite its adoption of Leninist views, humanitarianism continued to be the well-spring of the Party's anti-imperialism and its calls for colonial emancipation were qualified with demands for specific reforms in the interim.⁴⁰ In contrast, the main impetus behind the Communists' support of colonial nationalism remained, not the principle of self-determination or the benefits which would accrue to the colonial peoples once they were masters of their own destiny, but the achievement of Socialism. This message was occasionally confused by individual members who articulated other aims, but it was always the central imperative of Communism. Moreover, Communists judged such matters - albeit it often an unspoken assumption - in terms of the preservation and strengthening of the Soviet state. With this proviso in mind, their view of colonial liberation remained sincere enough in that they believed that 'In breaking a way for themselves from historical non-existence to the future, they (colonial nationalists) at the same time clear the path to the Socialist Revolution in the leading countries'.⁴¹

Africa Stirs

The economic recession which swept through Europe in the late 1920s and 1930s was seen by Communists as part of a general world crisis of capitalism - one which was

³⁷ 'ILP or CP Policy for Colonial Workers', in New Leader, 22-7-38, p.5.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ New Leader, 25-2-38.

⁴⁰ Democracy in the Empire, ILP Conference decisions and chairman's speech, ILP, 1942.

⁴¹ G. Safarov, 'The Theory of the National Colonial Revolution', in Communist Review, Vol. 4, No. 6, June 1932, p.289.

prophesied at the sixth congress of the Comintern in July 1928.⁴² In the light of this crisis and its perception of the African colonies as the last remaining prop of a decaying capitalist system, the Comintern's interest in Africa intensified during this period. The economic depression had a devastating effect on the colonies themselves from the autumn of 1929 - Nigeria, the Gold Coast and Gambia were particularly affected as the price of their most important exports such as tin, palm oil and cocoa, fell sharply.⁴³

Comintern reasoning, that such circumstances would fan anti-colonial activity on the continent, proved valid to the extent that labour unrest and general discontent in the Africa colonies developed at an accelerated rate during the world depression.⁴⁴ Padmore called upon the international revolutionary movement - especially the CPGB and the British section of the LAI - to 'render every possible assistance to this growing revolutionary movement in Africa',⁴⁵ But, in acknowledging the rising tide of African resistance, the Comintern's expectations of what was possible continued to be modelled on developments in Asia. 'We cannot understand', Padmore wrote to Kobina Sekyi, 'why there is no organised national movement . . . for independence (in the Gold Coast). . . You

⁴² Communists argued that the powers of production had grown too great for systems of private capitalism and class society. (See R. Palme Dutt, Capitalism or Socialism in Britain?, CPGB, 1931, p.3.) Dutt quoted official figures of the League of Nations Economic section which showed that between 1913 and 1928, world production of foodstuffs increased by 16%, of raw materials by 40% and world population by 10%. Between 1925 and 1928, world production of iron, steel, engineering, shipbuilding, motor and electrical industries increased by 25%. Ibid., p.11.

⁴³ The total value of the export/import trade of Britain's West African colonies fell from £40 millions in 1929 to £21 millions in 1931. (See B. Davidson, 1978, op.cit., p.132.) Land and labour policies, devoted to producing cash crops, had already destroyed the existing economic system in Africa, leaving its people at the mercy of the vagaries of world capitalism. (See P. Cain and A. Hopkins, British Imperialism, Crisis and Decolonisation 1914-1990, Longman, London, 1993, p.224.) Yet in the face of this crisis, colonial administrations cut public expenditure and increased taxes. (See Motilev, 'Year of World Crisis', in The Communist International, Vol. 7, No. 14, 1-12-30, p.326; G. Padmore, 'Agrarian Crisis in British West Africa', in The Communist International, Vol. 8, No. 13, 1-7-31, p.373.)

⁴⁴ In Gambia during 1929 a general strike was led by E.F. Small, then editor of Gambia Outlook and associate editor of Negro Worker. He was assisted by Bridgeman, who used the threat of Parliamentary questions to pressure the Secretary of State to conduct a full inquiry into the situation. (See E.T. Wilson, op.cit. p.241.) Eighty-three people were shot during a revolt against punitive taxes in Nigeria during December 1929, and subsequent unrest on the Nigerian railways led to the formation of the Nigerian Railway Workers' Union in 1932. Following the creation of the Labour Trade Union of East Africa in Kenya during 1934, a three year strike wave ensued, prompting Padmore, who also reported armed clashes between black workers and Government forces in South Africa, to warn of a potentially volatile situation in the colony. See G. Padmore, The Negro Worker, Vol. 1, No. 6, June 1931, pp.3-4.

⁴⁵ G. Padmore, The Negro Worker, Vol. 1, No. 6, June 1931, p.5.

lack the sustained organised movement, as in India, China . . . '46 Padmore might have added that Britain's colonies in West and East Africa also lacked an indigenous bourgeoisie and the level of economic development that could produce an organised nationalist movement of the type desired.⁴⁷ The fact that he ignored such factors is at least partly attributable to his schooling in Marxism-Leninism as it was preached in the ultra-left 'Third Period'.

If the Comintern regarded the time as ripe for extending its influence among black activists and African nationalist organisations, political events in Europe were to prove a major distraction from this objective. Early in 1933, the offices of the ITUCNW were attacked by Nazi forces and publication of the *Negro Worker* stopped. Padmore, who was deported from Hamburg after spending some weeks in a German gaol, wrote in April of that year; 'Most negroes in Europe and America as well as in the colonies do not yet fully realise that fascism is the greatest danger which confronts not only the white workers, but is the most hostile movement against the Negro race.'⁴⁸ 'The Soviet Union', he continued, 'is the only country in the world free from all forms of national oppression.'⁴⁹

The ITUCNW was initially transferred to Copenhagen⁵⁰ but, by August, Comintern funds had dried up and the organisation folded. Padmore reacted bitterly to the development,

⁴⁶ Letter, G. Padmore to Sekyi, 9-7-32, quoted in S. Rhodie, 'The Gold Coast Aborigines Abroad', in the *Journal of African History*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1965, p.394.

⁴⁷ The CPGB's analysis of the African situation was more measured. Hugo Rathbone argued that, as Britain had 'deliberately stifled' African attempts to develop their economy, 'while advanced colonial countries such as India can very well achieve independence prior to the imperialist countries . . . it may very well happen that the backward nature of Negro African economy may result in African independence being achieved *only parallel* with the revolution in imperialist countries'. Hugo Rathbone 'The Problem of African Independence', in *Labour Monthly*, Vol. 18, No. 4, April 1936, p.247. See also Hugo Rathbone, 'The Problem of African Independence', in *Labour Monthly*, Vol. 18, No. 3, March 1936, pp.161-172. It is possible that Rathbone's speculations were informed by the fact that the Comintern, despite the assiduous efforts of its central agencies as well as the work of its metropolitan national sections, had been unable to establish an African base for its activities outside of the Republic of South Africa.

⁴⁸ G. Padmore, *The Negro Worker*, Vol. 3, Nos. 4-5, April-May 1933, p.1.

⁴⁹ G. Padmore, *The Negro Worker*, Vol. 3, Nos. 4-5, April-May 1933, p.3.

⁵⁰ The editorial board of *The Negro Worker* in Spring 1933, consisted of: Padmore, editor and G. Kouyate, managing editor. Contributing editors were; Ford and Cyril Briggs (USA), Otto Huiswood, M.A. Ward (London), C. Alexander (West Indies), H. Crichlow (British Guiana), W. Daniel (West Africa), M. Nelson (Liberia), A. Nzula and E.T. Mofutsanyana (South Africa), Raoul Marquez (Angola), Luku Tate (Congo) and J. Kenyatta (East Africa).

accusing the Communists of deserting the colonial peoples in order to curry favour with their new imperialist allies as part of the popular front strategy. Such suspicions were intensified the following year, when the Soviet Union joined the League of Nations - an organisation dismissed by Palme Dutt in 1931 as 'nothing but a war-pact in peace-clothing.'⁵¹ Moscow's response to Padmore's complaints was to level accusations of 'black chauvinism' at its most effective black activist and to expel him from the movement in 1934.⁵² It was an incident which marked the beginning of a period of heightened race consciousness among representatives of the African and West Indian peoples, which culminated in a new, more radical form of Pan-Africanism.

The ILP and Black Activists

During the 1930s, a number of British-based colonial activists and groups developed close relationships with the ILP and the Labour left. Padmore, following his split from the Communists, was a notable example. Whilst in France during the early 1930s, he met John McNair, an ILP activist from Tyneside and future Party secretary who almost certainly influenced his political views and inspired his long-term association with the ILP. Following his arrival in Britain, Padmore's activities included addressing ILP Day and Summer Schools, attending public meetings and conferences called on behalf of the colonial peoples and writing for *New Leader* on questions affecting Africans and people of African descent.⁵³ He also served on the editorial board of *Left*, a monthly ILP publication, and contributed to *International African Opinion*. Although there is no evidence that Padmore ever became an ILP member - it is possible that his disappointment with the Communists persuaded him to avoid the constraints of organised political parties - he remained a loyal friend.⁵⁴

⁵¹ R. Palme Dutt, *Capitalism or Socialism in Britain?* CPGB, 1931, p.30.

⁵² E.T. Wilson, 1974, op.cit., p.260.

⁵³ Padmore's articles for *New Leader* included: 'Hands off the Colonies' (25-2-38), 'Colonial Fascism in the West Indies' (29-4-38), 'Why Moors Help Franco' (20-5-38), 'The British Empire is the Worst Racket Yet Invented by Man' (15-12-38).

⁵⁴ Letter, Len Edmondson to author, February, 1994.

Other colonial activists who worked with the ILP and contributed articles to *New Leader* during the 1930s and 1940s included Wallace Johnson, the Barbadian Chris Jones⁵⁵ - a former Communist who had been active as an organiser for the Seamen's Minority Movement⁵⁶ - and Jomo Kenyatta.⁵⁷ Kenyatta also wrote articles for *The Manchester Guardian* and *The New Statesman*, spoke to the Fabian Society and lectured for the Workers' Education Association during the late 1930s. Paul Robeson's lifelong Communist affiliations⁵⁸ did not prevent his developing relations with leading members of the Labour movement in this period. Stafford Cripps was a close friend, as was Norman Leys who, with fellow members of the Friends of Africa Committee,⁵⁹ attempted in vain to persuade Robeson to become involved with the South African Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union, ICU.⁶⁰ Even more sympathetic was the West Indian businessman and pan-Africanist, Ras Makonnen, who noted that non-Communist figures on the British political left such as Harold Laski, Arthur Creech Jones and Nancy Cunard were 'stridently taking up the burden of black injustice', and decided that 'the best place' to say what he had to say was in the ILP.⁶¹

⁵⁵ Chris Jones, originally known as Braithwaite, also worked for the IASB and contributed to its journal *International African Opinion*.

⁵⁶ Jones, who described his erstwhile comrades as 'opportunists', (R. Reynolds, *My Life And Crimes* Jarrolds, 1956, p.118.) came to be highly regarded by the ILP, an organisation with which he established close ties. After his death on September 9th, 1944, a committee was formed to raise money for his widow and children. Members included Padmore, secretary; Ethel Manin, treasurer; Reginald Reynolds; Ras Makonnen and John McNair, general secretary of the ILP. See 'Chris Jones: Fighter for the Oppressed', in *New Leader*, 23-9-44, p.7; 'The Late Chris Jones', in *New Leader*, 2-12-44, p.8.

⁵⁷ Kenyatta claimed in his article 'Hitler Could Not Improve On Kenya', *New Leader*, 21st. May, 1937, that the colonial peoples had not only been exploited and oppressed by various imperialist governments, but were living under conditions 'similar to those imposed by the Fascist Dictators of Europe.'

⁵⁸ Robeson visited London on many occasions during the 1920s and 1930s and often liaised between black radicals and the CP. He was a sponsor of the WASU and supported the Unity Theatre, under whose auspices he appeared in Ben Bengal's 'Plant in the Sun'.

⁵⁹ The Friends of Africa Committee was formed in 1934.

⁶⁰ Winifred Holtby, the Yorkshire novelist, Vera Brittain and William Ballinger were among those who tried to involve Robeson in ICU affairs. Ballinger, a representative of the Scottish Engineering Union, had been sent to South Africa in July 1928 to advise the ICU's leader, Clement Kadalie, on trade union matters. See P.S. Gupta, 1975, op.cit., pp.120-5. Robeson did travel to Spain in December 1937 to support the Republican forces in the company of Charlotte Haldane, wife of the scientist, J.B.S. Haldane - both of whom were Communists.

⁶¹ Ras Makonnen, *Pan-Africanism From Within*, K. King (ed.), OUP, 1973, p.112.

The South African campaigner Peter Abrahams, E.N. McKenzie - editor of *The Negro Citizen* - and Krishna Menon⁶² also collaborated with the ILP. During the late 1930s, Menon's India League was 'quite close to Labour advocates of a popular front with the Communists'.⁶³ George Lansbury and Tom Williams both served on the League's committees and its officers were drawn mainly from the ILP and Labour left.⁶⁴ The issue of Nigerian trade unions was covered for *New Leader* in 1945 by Oladipo Davies, general secretary of the WASU and former secretary of the Nigerian Youth Movement. This organisation drew close to the Labour Party during the 1930s and 1940s. According to Philip Garigue, the relationship became 'the dominant political colouring of the members of the Union'⁶⁵ and many of its supporters worked for the Labour Party during the 1945 general election.

Abyssinia

One issue which cost all British political parties support among the African diaspora was the invasion of Abyssinia by fascist Italy in October 1935. The Abyssinian crisis was an episode which demonstrated for many that the age of aggressive imperialism was not over.⁶⁶ It had the effect of galvanising the African diaspora, of persuading Africans and peoples of African origin that they should in future build upon their own resources, rather than trust their political allies in Europe. There was a perceived abandonment of Abyssinia by the West - the British Government, for example, imposed an embargo on arms and munitions to Abyssinia whilst selling oil to Mussolini - and this was

⁶² Menon, who studied under Harold Laski at the LSE, became joint secretary of the declining Commonwealth of India League in 1928, building it into a radical organisation campaigning for Indian independence, which was renamed the India League at the end of 1930. For Menon's biography see T.J.S. George, *Krishna Menon*, Taplinger, New York, 1965.

⁶³ P.S. Gupta, 1975, op.cit., p.231.

⁶⁴ Brockway, Brailsford, Wellock, Longden, Horrabin and Laski all served as officers in the India League. Menon also worked with Stafford Cripps and the Reverend Reginald Sorensen M.P., Brockway's brother-in-law. In addition to the India League, Brockway served on the Socialist Committee for Indian Independence together with Maxton, Campbell Stephens, J.M. McGovern and G. Buchanan - all M.P.s - and G.S. Dara, who ran the Indian Mission in London.

⁶⁵ Philip Garigue, 'The West African Students Union, a study in cultural contact', in *Africa*, Vol. XXII, January 1953, p.62.

⁶⁶ It was also seen to expose the hypocrisy of Christianity - the Catholic church in Rome blessed Italy's victory over the Abyssinians.

compounded by claims of a parallel betrayal by the Soviet Union following press reports claiming that the Bolshevik state traded with Italy during the invasion.

In fact, Soviet policy simultaneously supported independent action by the workers and League of Nations sanctions. A condemnation of Italian aggression, signed by Italian Communists and colonial representatives was issued by the Comintern in August 1935 and supplemented by a \$5,000 gift to the Abyssinian people, donated by the Soviet Union through the auspices of the Red Cross.⁶⁷ Palme Dutt claimed that, in formulating its position on the issue, Moscow had half an eye on British imperialist strategy. Whilst categorising the conflict as a war of colonial conquest which would mobilise the international working-class on behalf of the Abyssinian people, Communists also saw the invasion as the 'prelude of the Fascist offensive',⁶⁸ which would endanger the interests of British imperialism.

The Soviet Union's prior campaign for collective security was bound to emphasise the Italian aggression as evidence of the need for concerted measures to stop future fascist expansionism. But the effect of this position was to reinforce the belief among some colonial activists that promotion of the popular front alliance was taking precedence over the colonial liberation struggle in the priorities of the communist movement. It was a view which encouraged some black supporters to turn from the CP and concentrate their energies on promoting Pan-Africanism .

The ILP was also affected by the Abyssinian crisis. In the immediate aftermath of the Abyssinian invasion, *New Leader's* stance stressed the need for independent working-class action against the Italian Government - primarily a boycott of war materials and oil. A number of such actions were instigated world wide; among Greek seamen and dockers

⁶⁷ Noreen Branson, op.cit., pp.136-141; Milene Charles, The Soviet Union and Africa, University Press of America, 1980, pp.36-39.

⁶⁸ Rajani Palme Dutt, 1936, op.cit., p.253.

in France and South Africa, for example, while in Britain, the National Union of Boot and Shoe Operatives refused to work on orders for boots destined for the Italian troops.⁶⁹

The most enthusiastic supporters of this policy within the ILP were the small number of Trotskyist members, led by the Trinidadian, C.L.R. James. James, who was chair of Finchley ILP at this time,⁷⁰ argued that only independent and united action by British and African workers could overthrow imperialism and that sanctions would simply lead to another war which was of no interest to the working-class. He wrote to *New Leader* on 5th June 1936, explaining his position and the fact that it differed from that of the International African Friends of Abyssinia, which supported sanctions.

This approach was opposed,⁷¹ by the Parliamentary group, led by Maxton, which maintained that working-class sanctions would be indistinguishable from League of Nations sanctions and would only increase the risk of war. Such conflicts, they argued, should be regarded as clashes between the rival imperialist powers - furthermore, Haile Selassie was a dictator, presiding over a repressive system which sanctioned slavery. The ILP should concentrate on the overthrow of capitalism in Britain and leave such matters alone, the victory of either side being a matter of indifference for Socialists. It was an argument which revealed how far removed from Leninism some ILP leaders remained in their conception of imperialism.

A heated debate ensued at the Party's Easter Conference - 'the most exciting for years', according to *New Leader*⁷² - during which James moved a resolution condemning the decision to stand aloof from the conflict and recommending an international boycott of Italy by the working-class, in particular the blocking of arms and troops shipments. This was supported by conference, but the vote was overturned when the Party's three MPs;

⁶⁹ Noreen Branson, op.cit., p.140.

⁷⁰ *New Leader*, 4-10-35.

⁷¹ The ILP produced a pamphlet in which Bob Edwards, Brockway and James put the case in favour of workers' action and Maxton, McGovern and Joseph Southall argued against. See *New Leader*, 1-5-36.

⁷² *New Leader*, 17-4-36, p.4.

Maxton, Buchanan and McGovern, threatened to resign over the issue.⁷³ For the RPC, the decision not to support Abyssinia as the victim of imperialism proved to be the last straw, the Committee announced on 31st October 1935 that it was splitting from the ILP and joining the CPGB.⁷⁴ The Trotskyists, also disillusioned by the ILP's stance, left the Party in November 1936.⁷⁵ Despite his disappointment, James continued to co-operate with the Party until he left London for the USA in 1938.⁷⁶ But by this time, he was simultaneously advocating both Trotskyism and pan-Africanism.

The Communist movement itself rejected criticisms of its stance on Abyssinia by black activists and the *Daily Worker* published extensive coverage of the Abyssinian crisis by W.M. Holmes, the paper's correspondent there. William Patterson dismissed as reformist calls to 'go to Abyssinia' and 'die for Abyssinia',⁷⁷ arguing instead that 'the struggle against the imperialism directly oppressing them is the method the Negro people everywhere can best use to help the oppressed and enslaved masses of Abyssinia.'⁷⁸ The actions of Italian Communists and Socialists, he maintained, 'throw back into the cowardly traitorous face of Messrs. George Padmore and Co. the lie that white workers will not fight side by side with the black for the liberation of the black masses.'⁷⁹

⁷³ McGovern and Buchanan were subsequently congratulated by the organ of the British Union of Fascists for their line in the debate. See *New Leader*, 24-4-36.

⁷⁴ In a letter of resignation, Jack Gaster regretted that 'The ILP, in the face of the war menace, has abandoned struggle in support of Abyssinia, has refused to face up to the revolutionary implications of the fight against war, and adopted a line of opposition that is purely that of reliance upon pacifist resistance to war.' See *Daily Worker*, 5th November 1935; Quoted in Noreen Branson, op.cit., p.142.

⁷⁵ Padmore who, as a Marxist, was opposed both to the war and to the rule of the Abyssinian emperor, Haile Selassie, was reprimanded by James for accepting the argument that 'enlightened and far-sighted sections of the ruling-class in Europe with colonial interests in Africa' would co-operate with Africans. (See C.L.R. James, 'Civilising the Blacks', in *New Leader*, 29-5-36, p.5.) Ras Makonnen argued that Selassie's position with regard to his subjects - slavery was not abolished in the country until a decree of 1941- was an 'internal matter' to be settled 'amongst ourselves'. See R. Makonnen, 1973, op.cit., p.114

⁷⁶ James did not return to Britain until after 1947.

⁷⁷ For example, the New York Pan-African Construction Association was urging blacks in Harlem to volunteer for Abyssinia in 1935.

⁷⁸ William Patterson, 'The Abyssinian Situation and the Negro World', in *The Negro Worker*, Vol. 5, No. 6, June 1935, p.17.

⁷⁹ Ibid., p.18.

The IAFE and the IASB

In response to the Abyssinian invasion, an ad hoc committee formed to welcome to Britain the 1934 ARPS delegation was reconstituted into the International African Friends of Abyssinia (IAFA or IAFE⁸⁰) by C.L.R. James.⁸¹ The Committee consisted of James, chair; Kenyatta, secretary; Padmore; Dr. Peter Milliard from British Guiana; the Grenadian T. Albert Marryshaw; Sam Manning of Trinidad and Mohammed Said from Somaliland. The London office was run by Mrs A.A. Garvey, wife of Marcus Garvey, who also acted as Treasurer.⁸² According to Makonnen, the IAFE enjoyed great support from the black diaspora and was 'swamped' by letters from Africans on three continents who wished to register with the organisation.⁸³

In the month that Italy entered Addis Ababa, a weekly publication, *New Times and Ethiopia News* appeared, edited by Sylvia Pankhurst,⁸⁴ who was assisted by Nancy Cunard and Isabel Fry. Surprisingly, the journal carried no information on the IAFA, though a Friends of Abyssinia League of Service was advertised from the first issue. Also mentioned was the Abyssinia Association, of which Reginald Bridgeman was a prominent member,⁸⁵ and the International Committee for the Relief of the Victims of Italian Fascism.⁸⁶ Pankhurst's journal, praised by Padmore in June 1937 for 'excellent

⁸⁰ Ethiopia was often preferred to Abyssinia.

⁸¹ James had initially shared the Comintern's view of the Afro-American as a leader in the colonial revolution; they were, he wrote, 'designed by their whole historical past to be, under adequate leadership, the very vanguard of the proletarian revolution.' (Quoted in Scott McLemee and Paul Le Blanc (eds.), *CLR James and Revolutionary Marxism - selected writings of CLR James 1939-1949* Humanities Press, New Jersey, 1944, p.5.) He later modified this to one of Afro-Americans being *in* the vanguard and attacked the Comintern's support of colonial self-determination as mere sloganising. James was one of the first to challenge the accepted view of Britain's role in the abolition of slavery in his book, *Black Jacobins*. After joining the ILP in 1934, he came into contact with British Trotskyists, subsequently becoming a leading figure in this group and one of the founding members of the Fourth International in 1938.

⁸² G. Padmore, 1956, op.cit., p.145 also see I. Geiss, op.cit., pp.354-356.

⁸³ R. Makonnen, 1973, op.cit., p.116.

⁸⁴ Pankhurst was a staunch supporter of the Abyssinian cause; she regarded Selassie as a 'great reformer, an heroic patriot and a defender of the ideals of international law and justice'. (Letter, Sylvia Pankhurst to the *News Chronical*, 28-5-36, Sylvia Pankhurst Papers, (IISH).) In June 1940, she wrote to Churchill demanding rejection of the Anglo-Italian agreement which officially recognised Italy's claims in Abyssinia. See Letter, Sylvia Pankhurst to Churchill, 25th June, 1940, Sylvia Pankhurst Papers, (IISH).

⁸⁵ *New Times and Ethiopia News*, No. 4, 30-5-36.

⁸⁶ George Rude, the communist historian, served on the Provisional Committee of this body, which held conferences on 15th July and 23rd September, 1936. See *New Times and Ethiopia News*, No. 4, 30-5-36.

work . . . on behalf of Ethiopia and humanity',⁸⁷ transmogrified in September 1939 from 'the voice of victim nations and defenceless minorities', into 'the national anti-fascist weekly'. It did not share the Communist's anti-war hiatus during 1939-41 and rejected the view of the Second World War taken by many black activists, including William Patterson, that it was a 'white man's war, let them keep it imperialist.' 'Fascists are racists and imperialists', the journal proclaimed in October 1940, 'This war will touch upon the future of the colonial peoples sooner or later.'⁸⁸

The formation of the IASB in 1937 was reported as an unstructured event, without a 'clear membership', and with around thirty people present.⁸⁹ The Bureau, described in *New Times and Ethiopian News* as 'an organisation representing internationally progressive and enlightened opinion among Africans and people of African descent',⁹⁰ campaigned for democratic rights, civil liberties and self-determination for Africans and other colonial peoples. It protested vehemently against the National Government's treaty of friendship with Italy, which recognised the latter's conquest of Abyssinia, and the movement to placate the fascist powers by meeting their demands for colonies.

Membership of the IASB was open to all Africans, peoples of African descent and members of other races who sympathised with the aims and objectives of the organisation. Those who worked for the Bureau included Padmore; James; Wallace Johnson;⁹¹ Dorothy Pizer; Kenyatta, who was reportedly appointed vice-chair of the organisation in February 1938;⁹² Nancy Cunard; the Rev. Reginald Sorensen; Chris Jones and Ras Makonnen.⁹³ Among its patrons were D.N. Pritt; Sylvia Pankhurst; Arthur

⁸⁷ *New Times and Ethiopia News* 12th. June, 1937, p.5.

⁸⁸ *New Times and Ethiopia News* 7th. October, 1940, p.2.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.118.

⁹⁰ *New Times and Ethiopia News* 30-4-38, p.6.

⁹¹ In 1933 Wallace Johnson had visited the Gold Coast, where he was arrested and deported. During 1934-6 he worked with Nnamdi Azikiwe on the *African Morning Post*, organ of the West African Youth League, and he also edited the *African Standard*.

⁹² D. Savage, 'Jomo Kenyatta, Malcolm MacDonald and the Colonial Office 1938-9, in *The Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 3, 1970, p.628.

⁹³ G. Padmore, 1956, op.cit., p.48; I. Geiss, op.cit., pp.354-6.

Creech Jones and Victor Gollancz. In later years the organisation became especially close to the ILP - according to J.R. Hooker, it became 'in effect the colonial section of that declining party'.⁹⁴ Fenner Brockway printed IASB notices in *New Leader*, including its 'Manifesto Against the War', in November 1939,⁹⁵ and the Bureau itself operated from the ILP offices. But the surge of radical Pan-Africanism in the mid-1940s overtook the Bureau and, in 1944, it became one of thirteen groups which amalgamated to form the Pan-African Federation.

Colonial Seamen's Organisations

During the early 1930s, Communists intensified their efforts to establish links with colonial seamen who, they believed, had the potential to provide an international courier service for the Party. At the October 1930 International of Marine Workers, an International of Seamen and Harbour Workers (ISHW) was created as a special committee of the RILU.⁹⁶ One of its first acts was to form a Colonial Committee, which attempted to recruit colonial seamen for work in the colonies, and this was followed by the establishment of a Negro sub-committee in 1931. The organisation subsequently set up International Seamen's Clubs (ISC) - regarded as important points of contact with coloured workers⁹⁷ - in a number of key ports.

As the ITUCNW's first secretary, James Ford was charged with the task of making contact with African seamen who had settled in British ports during the inter-war years.⁹⁸ But under his direction progress was limited and there were complaints that not enough had been done to build up a network of ISCs. It was also argued within the CPGB itself that the Party regarded colonial work solely in terms of smuggling agents into colonial

⁹⁴ J.R. Hooker, *op.cit.*, p.50.

⁹⁵ IASB, *Manifesto Against the War*, in *New Leader*, 24-11-39.

⁹⁶ Resolution adopted by the International Representatives of Seamen and Cokers, Hamburg, 3-10-30, Box 1, (JTC); George Hardy, *Those Stormy Years*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1956, p.215. Hardy was president both of the Transport Workers' Minority movement and the International of Marine Workers and subsequently took charge of the Party's work with colonial seamen.

⁹⁷ Minutes of a Central Committee Meeting, 11 12-1-1930, Reel 1, (CPGBA)

⁹⁸ Permanent communities of colonial seamen and their families had taken root in Liverpool, Cardiff, Manchester and London.

countries, and that they had thus far only flirted with the idea of campaigning among the colonial seamen in Britain. When Padmore replaced Ford in 1931 however, the new secretary set about improving relations with the ISHW and establishing links with the Interclubs. By the end of that year, Chris Jones and his colleague Josh Headley were conducting work for the Seamen's Minority Movement among negro seamen in the dock areas and an ISC had been established under Headley in the East End of London.

During the First World War, foreign and coloured seamen were employed in the British merchant fleet as replacements for those men who had joined the Royal Navy. When the war ended, there were feelings of resentment on the part of the demobilised men towards the coloured communities which had sprung up as a consequence - resentments which sparked a number of riots during 1919.⁹⁹ Such attitudes were encouraged by the British authorities, which sought to give white seamen preference in employment - the 1925 Special Restriction (Alien Seamen) Order, which sought to deprive black seamen of jobs by classing them as aliens, and the Tramp Shipping Subsidy Act of 1935, which induced shipowners to employ white labour, were examples of this policy.¹⁰⁰

These discriminatory measures were supported by the NUS leadership, anxious to secure jobs for its white members, and many Labour M.P.s. Newspapers such as *The Manchester Guardian* and *The Daily Herald* colluded in the campaign; in June 1930 the *Daily Herald* wrote of the 'Negro Menace at Ports', and published calls to ban black workers from British ports.¹⁰¹ In addition to such threats against their employment, hardship was caused by the payment of a lower rate of benefit for unemployed coloured seamen than for their white counterparts.¹⁰² In 1935, *The Negro Worker* revealed that

⁹⁹ Riots occurred in the ports of Cardiff, Liverpool, Barry, Newport and South Shields. See Neil Evans, 'The South Wales Race Riots of 1919', in *Llafur*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Spring 1980.

¹⁰⁰ Marika Sherwood, 'Race and Resistance: Cardiff in the 1930s and 1940s' in *Llafur*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1991, pp.52-3; *The Keys*, Vol. 3, No. 2, p.20.

¹⁰¹ Margaret Clyde, 'Race Prejudice in 'Democratic' England', *The Negro Worker*, Vol. 1, No. 6, June 1931, p.13.

¹⁰² Alan Sheppard, 'Old Tiger Bay', in *The Alliance*, No. 1, July 1971.

transitional unemployment pay for black seamen in the port of Cardiff totalled 13s, compared with 15s 3p for whites.^{1 3}

This 'whites first' movement was seen by the CPGB as an opportunity to rally coloured workers to the Party. It stressed that the racial question would only be settled with the solving of the social question and that 'Only through the overthrow of the capitalist system will the exploited masses of all races and nationalities be freed'.¹⁰⁴ From the early 1930s, Communists worked in the ports through organisations such as the NWA; the LAI; the Coloured Seamen's Union (CSU),¹⁰⁵ and the Colonial Defence Association (CDA), which was formed in 1927.¹⁰⁶ Leading colonial activists and CPGB members who spoke at public meetings in the dockland areas included Ben Bradley, Wallace Johnson, Peter Abrahams, Padmore, C.L.R. James, Kenyatta, Nkrumah, Krishna Menon and Peter Koinange, the Kenyan political activist.¹⁰⁷

Communist party member Harry O'Connell, a British Guyanan who settled in Britain before the First World War, was active among the coloured communities in the South Wales ports, attending the 1932 ISHW Conference in Paris, possibly as a representative of the Seamen's Minority Movement.¹⁰⁸ A tireless campaigner for the rights of coloured seamen, he took an active part in building up the CP in Cardiff,¹⁰⁹ standing as the Communist candidate for the Adamstown ward in the General election of February 1950. Despite this involvement, O'Connell's commitment to black and coloured workers took precedence over his political allegiances - he had earlier fallen foul of the Comintern's

¹⁰³ The Negro Worker, Vol. 5, No. 6, June 1935, p.24.

¹⁰⁴ Margaret Clyde, op.cit.

¹⁰⁵ The CSU was probably established during the mid-1920s.

¹⁰⁶ St. Clair Drake, Value Systems, Social Structures and Race Relations in the British Isles unpublished PhD., University of Chicago, Illinois, June 1954.

¹⁰⁷ Dilip Hiro, 'Three Generations of Tiger Bay', New Statesman, 21-9-67; M. Sherwood, 'Racism and Resistance: Cardiff in the 1930s and 1940s', in Llafur, Vol. 5, No. 4, 1991, p.62. Petitions, public meetings and demonstrations were organised by the various organisations working for the civil rights of the black seamen.

¹⁰⁸ M. Sherwood, 1991, op.cit., p.60.

¹⁰⁹ Although he had little formal education, O'Connell was a passionate speaker and spoke for the CP on a range of issues. Ibid.

ambitions while attempting to found a West Indian Association in Britain. The initiative was allegedly obstructed by the CI's representative in Britain, Jan Valtin, because O'Connell refused to act as an intermediary between the International and activists in the West Indies.¹¹

O'Connell was active in the CDA - whose news sheet *Coloured Worker* was produced using the local CP's facilities - and in 1942 represented that organisation on an advisory committee which liaised with the Colonial Office on the question of a centre for colonial seamen. His work¹¹¹ on behalf of coloured seamen brought him into contact with the WASU and the LCP and, in March 1935, he travelled to London where he sought assistance from the LAI, the Society of Friends and the local Conservative M.P., Captain Arthur Evans. Evans, the Member for Cardiff prior to 1945, and Maxton both put down questions on the issue in the House of Commons.¹¹²

In the course of her excellent research on coloured seamen's organisations in Cardiff during the 1920s and 1930s, Marika Sherwood discovered that O'Connell worked closely with fellow Communists Alan Sheppard and Jim Nurse. Sheppard was a Guianese seaman who led the CDA during the 1940s and nurtured connections with Kenyatta and Cheddi Jagan, leader of the progressive left in British Guiana.¹¹³ Nurse, a Barbadian, served as an early vice-chair of the CDA. Aaron Mossell, an Afro-American who chaired the United Committee of Coloured and Colonial Organisations (UCCCO)¹¹⁴ and represented that organisation at the fifth Pan-African Congress, attended regular political meetings with O'Connell, Nurse and Sheppard, although Sherwood could find no evidence that Mossell was a CP member.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁰ J. Valtin, *Out of the Night*, Alliance Books, 1940, pp.385-6.

¹¹¹ In all probability, O'Connell's work led to an intensification of the discrimination to which he was personally exposed - the Shipping Federation barred him from employment on their ships and he was even excluded from the docks. See M. Sherwood, 1991, op.cit., pp.60-62.

¹¹² M. Sherwood, 1991, op.cit., p.59.

¹¹³ Ibid, p.63; St. Clair Drake, op.cit., pp.402-5.

¹¹⁴ The UCCCO was established in 1943.

¹¹⁵ M. Sherwood, 1991, op.cit., p.66.

Two other colonial organisations which fought against employment discrimination were the British Somali Society, BSS¹¹⁶ - in whose formation and running the CDA was involved - and the British branch of the Somali Youth League, SYL, which was established in the mid-1940s with the assistance of Makonnen, Padmore and Kenyatta. Both of these organisations campaigned for an independent Somalia in addition to aiding Somalis residing in this country - a minority which was particularly vulnerable to isolation and discrimination because of religious and linguistic differences. Duallah Mohammed, a prominent member of the BSS and leader of the SYL, had been a CP member since 1923¹¹⁷ and British officials considered the British League to be a means of contact between Communists in Somali and the CPGB.¹¹⁸ Their suspicions of British Communist involvement in Somalia rested on such flimsy evidence as a call by the League's president in Somalia, Mohammed Ahmed Ottavio, for the organisation to embrace Communism during a speech in 1950¹¹⁹ and the fact that its leader, Abdullahi Issa - who became Prime Minister of his country in 1956 - was in contact with Duallah during the late 1940s.¹²⁰

The proliferation of groups claiming to represent the needs of coloured workers in the maritime industry - O'Connell claimed that 'Cardiff is a breeding ground for coloured organisations'¹²¹ - inevitably led to rivalries and division. The League of Coloured Peoples, under pressure from its more radical members, also campaigned on behalf of the coloured seamen but tended to be regarded as interlopers and were unable to establish a permanent presence among the community. Communists did not encourage LCP involvement locally and played on suspicions raised over Moody's relationship with the

¹¹⁶ The BSS was formed around the mid-1930s.

¹¹⁷ Ras Makonnen, *op.cit.*, p.194, n.6.

¹¹⁸ A Survey of Communism in Africa, 2-11-50, CO 537 5263, (PRO).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ M. Sherwood, 1991, *op.cit.* p.65. Issa was a particularly close associate of Mohammed Jama, secretary of the SYL's Cardiff branch, who arrived in Britain in 1949.

¹²¹ Negro Welfare Association, Annual Report, 20-10-35.

Colonial Office - which was exposed during the Aggrey House controversy. Despite this, the CPGB was not averse to working with the League on a national level.

O'Connell worked hard to persuade his white comrades of the importance of involving themselves more deeply with the day-to-day struggles of black and coloured workers in Britain and urged the Party to instigate a mass recruiting campaign in London, Cardiff, Liverpool and other dockland areas. That he had to do so was a sad reflection on their commitment, but whether a more active role on their part would have been welcomed by the local population is not clear. It was argued on occasions that organisations claiming to represent the interests of black and coloured workers failed precisely because they were perceived to be led by white Communists, intent on serving their own political ends. Nevertheless, at the CPGB's 13th Congress in 1935, in his report on Party work among colonial seamen, O'Connell appealed for 'a little more political attention' from the Party. 'We have coloured members in Cardiff of the CP (sic) taking part every day in the struggles of building the Party in Cardiff.' This commitment was made, he noted, despite the warnings of 'reformist' leaders that they were being used for political purposes.¹²²

The Negro Welfare Association

According to Peter Blackman, who joined the Negro Welfare Association in September 1937 and became its chairman shortly afterwards, the organisation was established during the 1920s¹²³ by the ex-seaman, Arnold Ward, under the auspices of the CPGB.

Blackman, a CP member who settled in Britain in 1938, was active in the LAI and its successor, the Colonial Information Bureau, and was later involved in the Committee for West Indian Affairs, (see below). He also served on the E.C. of the LCP and edited that organisation's journal, *The Keys*, a surprising appointment given the League's moderate political stance. Blackman later became disillusioned with the Communists and left the

¹²² Report on the 13th CPGB Congress, 1935, Resolution on the Colonial Question, in R.P.Dutt, 1935, *op.cit.*

¹²³ This is an earlier date than that given by the LAI.

CP towards the end of the 1950s, although, like many other colonial activists, he retained his adherence to Marxist ideas.¹²⁴

Another prominent member of the NWA was J. Desmond Buckle, a medical student from the Gold Coast who became secretary of the Association in April 1939. Buckle, who joined the CPGB in the early 1940s, served as a member of the CP's Colonial Committee in addition to working on the Party's International Affairs Committee and Africa Committee. He edited the Africa Committee's *Africa Newsletter* between 1950-1954, worked as a Tass correspondent during the 1940s and remained a member of the CP until his death in the mid-1960s.¹²⁵

From the mid-1930s, the NWA was in close contact with individuals and organisations promoting the anti-colonial cause in Britain.¹²⁶ R.J. Macdonald, in his introduction to the volume of reprints of '*The Keys*', states that 'Emphasis in the past has been placed upon the ideological and philosophical differences that separate the LCP from such other organisations as the Communist-backed Negro Welfare Association, WASU or the West African Students Union, and the militant International African Service Bureau. In fact, throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s a series of issues provided them with a common ground for either joint or parallel action.'¹²⁷

Even during the early 1930s, when the Comintern was still pursuing the ultra-left line adopted in 1928, British Communists obtained a degree of co-operation with other anti-colonial organisations, the Scottsboro case (see above), is an example of this.¹²⁸ The LCP was willing to pass information to the LAI for action during this period. When in February 1932, Reginald Bridgeman wrote to the Secretary of State for the Home

¹²⁴ M. Sherwood, 'Peter Blackman, 1909-1993', in The Association for the Study of African, Caribbean and Asian Culture and History in Britain, Newsletter 7, September 1993.

¹²⁵ H. Adi, 1994 Paper, op.cit.

¹²⁶ NWA, Annual Conference Report, 20-10-35.

¹²⁷ Roderick J. MacDonald, The Keys, the official organ of the LCP (reprints), Kraus Thomson, 1976, p.14

¹²⁸ The Keys, Vols. 1-7, 1933-39.

Department, Sir Herbert Samuel, in connection with the colour bar in Britain, this action was a result of information supplied to the League by David Tucker, Publicity Secretary of the LCP.¹²⁹ But such interaction did not prevent attacks on Moody in the pages of the *Negro Worker*. In a report on the NWA's activities in autumn 1934, Ward accused Moody of trying to crush all other Negro organisations, including the Negro Welfare Association.¹³

In line with Comintern policy, the organisation missed no opportunity to attack the Communists' social democratic rivals. One example occurred in June 1932 at a meeting of white and coloured workers and colonial students convened by the Association in Charter Hall, London, where the chief speaker was A.A. Cipriani, President of the Trinidad Labour Party. During the proceedings, a resolution was passed which severely criticised the British Labour Party for its policy of continuity in colonial affairs.¹³¹ There is no doubt that such attacks adversely affected the NWA's credibility with the British labour movement - when gathering information and advice on colonial matters, the mainstream labour movement tended to shun the organisation,

Despite political differences however, the Association was able to extend its collaboration with non-Communist groups on certain issues during the popular front period. This was evident at a conference held on 18th September, 1937, to coincide with a League of Nations meeting, which was attended by the LCP, IASB, NWA and Friends of Abyssinia.¹³² A further example is provided by the NWA's Annual General meeting in January 1939, when Keith Alleyne of the LCP expressed the League's desire to cooperate with the NWA in the drive for solidarity among coloured peoples.¹³³ A memo submitted to the Bledisloe Commission - appointed to explore the possibility of closer union between the Rhodesias and Nyasaland - was jointly drawn up and submitted by the NWA,

¹²⁹ *The Negro Worker*, 2 3rd.March, 1932, pp.30-31.

¹³⁰ *The Negro Worker*, 4 6th. October-7th. November, 1934.

¹³¹ *The Negro Worker*, 2-4-1932.

¹³² *New Times and Ethiopia News* 18-9-37, p.3.

¹³³ NWA, Annual Conference Report, 1939.

the IASB and the LCP,¹³⁴ The Association also received some practical support from Co-operative societies, trade unions and other labour organisations - Ben Bradley argued with some overstatement that this was evidence of the great support forthcoming from the British working-class for colonial peoples.¹³⁵

During 1937-8, the NWA sent speakers to a total of sixty-three meetings organised to discuss the unrest which was breaking out in the West Indies,¹³⁶ and was one of a number of pressure groups consulted by the Labour Party's Imperial Committee and the TUC's Colonial Committee during the West Indian revolts. In May 1938, a deputation lobbying the Colonial Office on the issue included Bridgman;¹³⁷ Moody; Dorothy Woodman,¹³⁸ who represented the Union of Democratic Control; Ronald Kidd and Ben Bradley.¹³⁹ A joint memo from the LCP, NWA and IASB was submitted to the Moyne Commission,¹⁴⁰ which was appointed in the summer of 1938 to look into the deteriorating situation in the West Indies, and Moody and Blackman subsequently appeared before the Commissioners to submit oral evidence.¹⁴¹ In June 1938, the LCP convened a meeting to discuss the question at which the speakers included Reginald Bridgman, Peter Blackman, Ronald Kidd,¹⁴² Leslie Webb¹⁴³ and W. Arthur Lewis. The resolution which resulted from these discussions included the demand for universal adult suffrage, the removal of the property qualification for members of the Legislature and for the Federation of the West Indies with complete self-government.¹⁴⁴

¹³⁴ *The Keys*, Vol. 6, No. 2, p.15.

¹³⁵ NWA, Annual General Meeting report, 29-1-39.

¹³⁶ NWA, Annual Report, December 1937-December 1938.

¹³⁷ During 1938, Bridgman resigned from the NWA's E.C., but continued to assist the organisation within the limits imposed by his position as a prospective Parliamentary candidate for the Labour Party.

¹³⁸ Dorothy Woodman - who married Kingsley Martin, editor of *New Statesman* - was secretary of the Union of Democratic Control from 1930.

¹³⁹ *The Keys*, Vol. 6, No. 1, p.15.

¹⁴⁰ The Commission's chair, Lord Moyne, later became Secretary of State for the Colonies; the representatives of British labour were Walter Citrine and Morgan Jones - there were no representatives of West Indian labour serving on the body. See Peter Brown, 'Royal Commission to the West Indies', in *World News and Views*, Vol. 18, No. 55, 19-11-38, pp.954-5.

¹⁴¹ *The Keys*, Vol. 6, No. 1, p.15.

¹⁴² Kidd represented the National Council for Civil Liberties.

¹⁴³ Webb represented the Methodist Church.

¹⁴⁴ *The Keys*, Vol. 6, No. 1, p.10.

Virtually from its formation, the NWA - initially hamstrung by Comintern policies and passed over by Labour leaders, later viewed with mounting suspicion by a community increasingly turning away from the traditional 'white dominated' political parties¹⁴⁵ - had problems recruiting members. Between 1933 and 1935 it was only able to attract fifteen new recruits,¹⁴⁶ despite advertising in the newspapers and extending invitations to every black person known to the Association in London. Under the popular front strategy, all efforts were made to extend the membership. When, in October 1935, it was suggested that black activists were dissuaded from joining the organisation because it had been initiated by whites, Bridgeman proposed that the NWA be put under total black leadership. He also pointed out that the NWA was greatly modifying its phrasing and presenting a milder, less radical image in its new constitution.¹⁴⁷ But this was to no avail, by 1939, Blackman was warning that a membership drive was essential to combat the dwindling membership figures and in 1940 the organisation folded, its demise hastened by war conditions.

Communism in the West Indies

As with the African colonies, the depression of 1929-34 took its toll on the economies of the British West Indies; throughout the period sugar prices plummeted, wage levels were cut and unemployment soared, triggering a period of unprecedented militancy. From 1933, labour unrest spread throughout the region - the unemployed demonstrated in Port

¹⁴⁵ An example of this was provided at a Conference on African Peoples' Democracy and World Peace, which was organised jointly by the NWA, the LCP, the Coloured Film Artists Association and the Gold Coast Students' Association in 1939. The event, held in London from 7th-9th July 1939, was a heterogeneous affair, speakers included Stafford Cripps, Creech Jones, W. Mainwaring M.P., Padmore, William Ofori Atta of the Gold Coast and Dudley Collard. Harold Moody presided and Peter Blackman was vice-chair. As the event proceeded, there were complaints that the Conference should be run exclusively by Africans and these were backed by noisy demonstrations from the floor led by Jomo Kenyatta. Harry O'Connell, representing the CDL, and Sawyer from the NWA argued for co-operation with whites and on this occasion, managed to carry the majority with them. Nevertheless, this episode illustrated the problems faced by the CPGB in its efforts to propagate a class-based ideology among a section of the population whose experiences were built on their race origins. See Report of a Conference of African Peoples' Democracy and World Peace, 1939, M.Sherwood Papers.

¹⁴⁶ NWA, Annual Report, 20-10-35.

¹⁴⁷ NWA, Annual report, 20-10-35.

of Spain and workers struck on sugar plantations in Trinidad, British Guiana and Jamaica. Discontent initially focussed on economic issues but soon encompassed demands for political independence and it was during this period that the nascent trade union movement and first modern political parties began to emerge.¹⁴⁸

A series of strikes during 1937-1938¹⁴⁹ particularly alarmed the authorities and led to the suppression of many West Indian political activists. In reply to an occupation of the Trinidad oil fields by workers in June 1937, the Government despatched H.M.S. Ajax and a company of marines to the area. Despite the scale of this response, the strike rapidly spread to other industries and the workers began to organise into unions and to demand collective bargaining. Similar unrest occurred in Barbados, where six workers were killed during a demonstration in Bridgetown, and in Jamaica, where such clashes resulted in a rising death toll.¹⁵⁰

The Forster Commission and later the Moyne Commission - publication of which was delayed until 1940 because it was judged to be injurious to the reputation of the United Kingdom - were set up as a response to these developments. Critics pointed out that the substance of the reports produced by these Commissions indicated the path that Britain would take in order to quell the colonial workers' resistance - this included the development of 'tame' trade unions, susceptible to Government manipulation, in an effort to undermine genuine, more militant labour organisations.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁸ Richard Hart, Aspects of Early Caribbean Worker's Struggles in Caribbean Societies: Collected Seminar Papers, Vol. 1, No. 29, 1982. Some limited trade union rights had been granted in Jamaica and Guyana after 1919, but elsewhere, in Trinidad and Tobago for example, workers' rights were sacrificed in deference to the oil industry. See also W. James 'The Hurricane That Shook the Caribbean', New Left Review, 138, March-April 1983, pp. 85-91.

¹⁴⁹ This unrest was triggered by the poverty, malnutrition, starvation wages and coercion of the people in the face of soaring super profits for companies such as Tate and Lyle, United Trust and Apex Oil. See New Leader, 19-8-38, p.5.

¹⁵⁰ G. Padmore, 'Colonial Fascism in the West Indies', in New Leader, 29-4-38.

¹⁵¹ Jack Woddis, The Mask is Off, Thames Publications, London, 1954, pp.5-6.

In the climate of dissent and repression which enveloped the British West Indies at this time, Communism could have been expected to take root, and there is some evidence of links with Western CPs - the Barbadian activist Ulric Grant, who was imprisoned for sedition during the 1937 riots, had connections with William Zak Foster, the CPUSA leader, for example¹⁵² - and also of the spread of Marxist ideas. In Jamaica, from the late 1930s, Communists operated within the Peoples National Party of Jamaica (PNP) which, although classed as a bourgeois democratic organisation, was seen by the CPGB as a 'stepping stone' towards the revolution.

Despite such optimism, the radical impulse within organisations like the PNP remained within bounds - by the late 1930s there was still no call for independence - and in addition, the CPGB had to contend with severe disunity within the Jamaican labour movement. There was great rivalry between the PNP, the dominant centrist wing of which was led by Norman Manley, and followers of Alexander Bustamante, a cousin of Manley and leader of the Bustamante Industrial Trade Union (BITU), as they competed for the support of the workers. At one point, Bustamante was described by an exasperated Ben Bradley as a 'confounded nuisance';¹⁵³ nevertheless, he enjoyed widespread support based on his appeal to the 'racial consciousness...of the exploited and oppressed' - factors that had to be weighed in his favour, despite the fact that he 'had no intention of challenging colonialism, let alone capitalism'.¹⁵⁴

The Jamaican left, which was itself divided, was represented by figures like Richard Hart - President of the Railway Employees Union, with whom Harry Pollitt met during a visit to Jamaica by the CPGB's secretary in 1938 - Will Isaacs, Frank Hill and Ken Hill, all of whom served on the PNP's EC.¹⁵⁵ Hart was seen as the most pro-Soviet of the Jamaican

¹⁵² M. Nicholson, op.cit., p.242.

¹⁵³ Ken Post, Strike the Iron, a Colony at War: Jamaica 1939-1945, Vol. 2, Humanities Press, New Jersey, 1981, p.429.

¹⁵⁴ W. James, op. cit., p. 87.

¹⁵⁵ M. Nicholson, op.cit., p.233.

Communists, and therefore received the most attention from the British CP.¹⁵⁶ Following Pollitt's visit to Jamaica - ostensibly during a convalescent cruise of the Caribbean - Hart struck up a correspondence with Bradley, who wrote that the PNP was an organisation in which 'all the best elements of various sections of people in Jamaica should find a place.'¹⁵⁷ Bradley despatched copies of *Inside The Empire* and other CP publications to Hart, who reciprocated with information on the situation in the colony and literature which included copies of *Public Opinion* and *The Masses*, journal of the Jamaican left. By the end of 1943, the situation appeared promising; many of those imprisoned during the 1938 riots¹⁵⁸ had been released to resume their activities within the PNP and the trade unions and, by the end of that year, Communists had gained control of the Federation of Government Employees Association, and the Jamaican TUC.

However, by 1944 the PNP's right wing was taking the initiative and the Communist movement, cautious not to disrupt the Allied war effort, ceased its tentative encouragements. The CPGB advised the Jamaican left against an offensive within the organisation, fearing that a fragmented and weakened labour movement would result. In July of that year, Bradley wrote to Hart warning that, 'Anything that would cause a split in the PNP should be vigorously avoided.'¹⁵⁹ This advice put the Communist faction in the untenable position of participating fully in PNP affairs whilst simultaneously seeking to preserve its political independence. As a result of this contradictory stance, Communist influence diminished and the Jamaican left became disoriented and disillusioned.

In Trinidad, the main workers' organisation was the Trinidad Workingmens' Association,¹⁶⁰ which was renamed the Trinidad Labour Party (TLP), in 1934. The organisation was led in the 1920s by the white Trinidadian nationalist Captain Arthur Cipriani, who built up a mass labour movement and developed links with the British

¹⁵⁶ Ken Post, op.cit., p.431.

¹⁵⁷ Quoted in Ibid, p.429.

¹⁵⁸ The riots developed from a strike in the Tate and Lyle sugar industry.

¹⁵⁹ Ken Post, op.cit, p.457.

¹⁶⁰ The TWA was founded in 1897.

Labour Party. In the years following the first world war, C.L.R. James had embraced the ideas of Cipriani and wrote his biography, *The Case for West Indian Self-Government*.¹⁶¹ However, James' views moved to the left following his years in Britain from 1932,¹⁶² whereas the TLP developed into an essentially reformist organisation which was rejected by more militant Trinidadian workers.

When riots broke out in the colony's oil fields during June 1937, they were led by T. Uriah Butler, a radical campaigner for trade union and workers rights. Butler stressed that the unrest was a direct result of the oil company's policy of freezing wages in the face of soaring living costs, a policy which continued even after the Depression ended and company profits rose. The Trinidad authorities, fearful of a threat to economic and political stability, arrested Butler in December 1937 and sentenced him to two years hard labour for sedition. But their actions failed to halt the organisational process and several new trade unions emerged in the wake of the clashes, including the Oilfield Workers Trade Union, the All-Trinidad Sugar Estates and Factory Workers Union and the Public Workers Union. Government responded by introducing compulsory registration of unions as a way of controlling organised labour - a move which was supported by the British TUC.

A small group of Marxists operated in Trinidad during the 1930s, meeting regularly to study Communist literature and debate ideas. Although the *Negro Worker* and publications of the RILU and ITUCNW, which carried attacks on both Cipriani and the MacDonald government, were banned by the Trinidad government in April 1932, this literature was still smuggled in. There is also some evidence of a CPGB link - the political activist and Trinidadian barrister Cola Rienzi, also known as Krishna D. Narayan, had earlier connections with Shapurji Saklatvala¹⁶³ and when, in November

¹⁶¹ Richard Hart, op.cit.

¹⁶² During this time James worked as a cricket correspondent for the Manchester Guardian. See C.L.R. James, Beyond a Boundary, Hutchinson and Co. Ltd., London, 1963, p.123.

¹⁶³ M. Nicholson, op.cit., pp.235-6.

1938, the newly-formed Oilfield Workers Trade Union went to an Arbitration tribunal one of the workers' nominees on the board was Dudley Collard, a British barrister with Communist associations.¹⁶⁴ But these were small inroads; only a handful of Communists operated in Britain's West Indian colonies, where political consciousness was still in its infancy during the 1930s and 1940s. Under such conditions it was extremely difficult for the CPGB to construct a base from which to extend its activities and spread the Communist message.

CWIA

As a result of the deteriorating situation in the British West Indies, the Committee for West Indian Affairs was formed at a meeting held in the House of Commons on 8th November, 1938. The purpose of this body, which included a significant Communist presence, was to publicise conditions in the West Indies, make representations to relevant government departments and to mobilise support in Britain for the West Indian peoples. Members included the Labour M.P. Arthur Creech Jones - later to serve as Labour's Secretary of State for the Colonies - who at one point acted as chair for the organisation; secretary Peter Blackman, who represented the NWA; Harold Moody; Sir Stafford Cripps; Rita Hinden; Hyacinth Morgan;¹⁶⁵ John Jagger M.P.,¹⁶⁶ Alex Gossip of the NAFTA; Dr. C.B. Clarke from Barbados; Reginald Bridgeman; Dr. H.B. Morgan of the TUC; C.Rienzi, Trinidadian OWTU; D.N. Pritt M.P. and Dudley Collard.¹⁶⁷

The number of Communists and Communist sympathisers serving on the Committee coloured the labour movement's reaction to the organisation from the outset. When Blackman wrote to William Gillies, informing him of the Committee's formation and offering the CWIA's assistance to the Labour Party, he did not receive a reply. He wrote again on December 8th, notifying Gillies that Charles Roden Buxton and the M.P.s

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ The Grenadian-born, right-wing Labour M.P.

¹⁶⁶ Jagger served with Dudley Collard on the OWTU's arbitration tribunal: see above.

¹⁶⁷ Letter, P. Blackman to W. Gillies, 16-11-38, William Gillies Papers (WGP), MMLH; S. Howe, *op.cit.*, pp.104-5.

Benjamin Riley, H. Tomlinson and Arthur Pearson had joined the Committee.¹⁶⁸ Gillies subsequently put the organisation in touch with Leonard Woolf, secretary of the Party's Advisory Committee on Imperial Affairs, and Beresford Kemmis of the TUC's International Department. The Committee was told that formal co-operation with the LP was 'unnecessary', but that any communications would receive consideration.¹⁶⁹

Despite the lukewarm response by labour leaders, the Committee continued to grow and was later joined by the Labour M.P. David Adams, Desmond Buckle, Mr. T.R. Cox, Olive Crutchley, Dr. O.H. Wallen, Elmer Worrel, Sir William Jowett M.P. and Wilfred Paling M.P.¹⁷⁰ Links were established with organisations and individuals in the West Indies, including Norman Manley, Ken Hill and Amy Bailey of Jamaica.

On 22nd December 1938, a CWIA deputation met with the TUC's Colonial Department to ask for their assistance in bringing West Indian activists to Britain to train as organisers, and for financial help in building the trade union movement in the West Indian colonies. The deputation also requested assistance in pressing for political and economic reforms. The Colonial Department representatives were Dr. Drummond Shiels, chair; Roy MacGregor; H.S.L. Polak; C. R. Buxton; T. Reid; Philip Cox; Creech Jones; Dr. H.B. Morgan and H.B. Kemmis. The deputation consisted of Moody, Blackman and Keith Alleyne - who represented the Colonial Students Association on the CWIA.

By the conclusion of the meeting, the Colonial Committee had agreed in principle to the Committee's requests.¹⁷¹ However, when Blackman contacted the TUC again in April 1939 to discuss the training of colonial trade union activists, Citrine refused to meet him and the issue was delegated to Kemmis. In order to counter the threat from what they

¹⁶⁸ Letter, P. Blackman to W. Gillies, 8-12-38, (WGP).

¹⁶⁹ Letter, W. Gillies to L. Woolf, 10-12-38; Letter, L. Woolf to W. Gillies, 12-12-38; Letter W. Gillies to P. Blackman, 12-12-38, (WGP).

¹⁷⁰ CWIA, Membership list in Annual Report, November 1938-9.

¹⁷¹ Report of CWIA Delegation to the TUC's Colonial Committee, 22-12-38.

now regarded as a 'dangerous body', Citrine, Woodcock, Kemmis, Wray and others set up a West Indian sub-committee in an attempt to marginalise the work of the CWIA.¹⁷²

By the early 1940s, splits were appearing in the Committee itself, culminating in an acrimonious correspondence between Blackman and the chair, David Adams, in May 1943. In the course of these exchanges, Adams informed the CWIA's secretary that the group of Labour M.P.s involved were severing their links with the Committee. He went on to dispute the CWIA's claimed connections with 'organised and other workers in the colonies' and denied that the organisation had played a significant part in the progress of reforms in the West Indies.¹⁷³

Conclusion

Increasingly throughout the 1930s, in line with the growing influence of Marxist ideas among British intellectuals, elements of the Labour left and, most significantly, the ILP, moved towards the Leninist position on imperialism and colonial independence. The failures of the 1929-31 Labour Government followed by the introduction of the popular front, which left the door open for Communists to work within a wider constituency, encouraged this development. But the central thrust of the new strategy - the Communist movement's determination to meet the threat to the Soviet Union from Nazi Germany and its fascist allies - was claimed to have cost the support of many black members.

One aspect of this policy was the Soviet Union's interpretation of the Italian invasion of Abyssinian - an event of great significance to the African diaspora - as the beginning of the fascist move against the Soviet Union rather than simply an act of imperialist annexation. It was an issue which also caused dissent and confusion within the ILP, which was torn between a call for working-class action against imperialist aggression and a policy of distance from a dispute between imperialist nations. The result was a growing

¹⁷² Minutes of a TUC Meeting held on 23-5-39.

¹⁷³ Letters, D. Adams to P. Blackman, 7-5-43; P. Blackman to D. Adams, 17-5-43; D. Adams to C.W.W. Greenridge, 24-5-43; D. Adams to P. Blackman, 24-5-43.

determination by black activists to construct their own road to freedom¹⁷⁴ which adversely effected the Communist Party's efforts to recruit colonial radicals in Britain despite interaction between Communists and British-based black support groups such as the LCP and the IASB.

But the extent to which the Communist movement's anti-colonial work was damaged by popular front tactics and the prioritising of the fight against fascism is unclear. Black activists did not completely desert the CP and turn away from Marxist theories in France for example, where French colonials such as Césaire worked with the Communists after the Popular Front Government was established. C.J. Robinson maintains that many black radicals retained 'aspects of Marxism for their critique of capitalism and imperialism',¹⁷⁵ and Imanuel Geiss, while claiming that Communism merely 'filled the gap' in Pan-African development between 1927 and 1934, concedes that Marxist ideas helped shape the political views of some African leaders.¹⁷⁶

Even Padmore refrained from attacking his erstwhile Communist allies in public because he was unwilling to undermine Soviet Russia's support of colonial liberation. It was a measure of his belief in the fundamental worth of Communist anti-imperialist ideas that he retained much of his Marxist philosophy and regard for the USSR. By the late 1930s he had conceded that the experiences of Abyssinia and China and of Hitler's demand for colonies proved what Marxists had been arguing for decades - that the proletariat and the colonial peoples were allies and that the problems of self-determination and imperialist war were inseparable. Whilst he considered the Party's popular front stance 'a tragedy' - on the grounds that their advocacy of collective security misrepresented British imperialism as a 'good imperialism' - he concluded in 1938 that, 'from recent indications .

¹⁷⁴ Padmore wrote that, 'With the realisation of their utter defencelessness against the new aggression from Europeans in Africa, the blacks felt it necessary to look to themselves.' G. Padmore, op.cit., pp.145-6.

¹⁷⁵ C.J. Robinson, 'Black Intellectuals at the British Core: 1920s-1940s', in J.S. Gundara and Ian Duffield, Essays on the History of Blacks in Britain, Aldershot, 1992.

¹⁷⁶ Imanuel Geiss, op.cit., pp.339-340.

. . Stalin is preparing the way for a Communist reversion to the 'old line'. Let us hope so.¹⁷⁷

There has been criticism of the CPGB's level of commitment to anti-colonial politics and suggestions that this was a cause of its failure to progress further in its work with black militants, yet it was the case that the Party leadership consistently urged its membership towards a greater interest in colonial issues.¹⁷⁸ British Communists faced an uphill task in this work simply because, unlike the situation in France, the number of black activists in Britain remained very small.¹⁷⁹ This was not the main problem for the CPGB, however. The hurdle which prevented the Party from progressing in its attempts to foster Communism in the British colonies of Africa and the West Indies remained the lack of organised nationalist movements there and, despite political stirrings during the 1930s, the continuing low level of political consciousness in these territories.

¹⁷⁷ G. Padmore, 'Hands Off Colonies', in New Leader, 25-2-38, p.2.

¹⁷⁸ There was an attempt in the early 1930s to set up Party machinery which would ensure a more efficient transfer of anti-colonial theory into practical initiatives. Robin Page Arnot put forward a number of proposals along these lines; these included a national department solely concerned with colonial work, district colonial committees which would call regular colonial conferences and a Party member in each district who would carry responsibility for colonial work. Most importantly, Arnot stressed that colonial work should arise out of the lives and experiences of the members, rather than as a response to directives from headquarters. Minutes of a Central Committee Meeting, 11 12-1-1930, Reel 1, (CPGBA). But this was a time when CP membership had fallen sharply - to a little more than 2,000 in 1930 - and sectarianism insisted that activists took on a burgeoning workload, including the establishment of red trade unions to rival the TUC.

¹⁷⁹ From the mid-1920s Paris was host to a number of radical African groups which had close links with the French CP. See J.A. Langley, 1969, op.cit., p.74.

CHAPTER SIX: THE WAR YEARS 1939-45

Anti-Fascists

Prior to Britain's declaration of war with Nazi Germany on 3rd September 1939, the CPGB's main fear was that the British Government would reach an accommodation with Hitler. Consistent with its chief priority - the defence of the Soviet state - the Party had argued for a military alliance between the Western powers and the USSR, this being Moscow's preferred method of containing Hitler until the summer of 1939.¹ The CPGB was also concerned that sections of the left, in their desire for peace, were prepared to placate the fascist powers by backing their demands for the return of their former colonies. In August 1939 *Labour Monthly* argued that 'Fascism, aided by the pro-Fascist elements in the imperialist countries, is attempting to entrench itself in the colonies. At the same time it uses the misguided elements in the progressive movement who support its demands. In this way, behind a smoke screen of the demand for the return of its former colonies, Fascism actively prepares its machinery for the eventual repartition of the globe.'²

A further danger was the championing by Germany of national independence for the colonial peoples. 'Fascism is gaining important footholds in the colonial countries,' the Party warned, 'entrenching itself in the progressive liberation movements' so that they should serve its war aims. It was consequently essential to stress that, 'Heavy and oppressive as the lot of the colonial peoples is under existing imperialist rule, it would be immeasurably worse under Fascism',³ and to warn against a distortion of the slogans of colonial freedom in the interests of fascist domination of the colonial peoples. The Party reasoned that it had the right to carry this message precisely because 'Communists are the

¹ W. Thompson, *op cit.*, pp.65-66.

² 'Colonies and Fascism', *Labour Monthly*, Vol. 21, No. 8, August 1939, p 466

³ *Ibid.*, p 468.

most serious and consistent fighters for the right of self-determination of the colonial peoples'.⁴

The British Communist Party's initial reaction to the outbreak of hostilities therefore, was to cautiously welcome what it regarded as the next step in the struggle already engaged in Manchuria, Abyssinia and Spain, although it still regarded the National Government as an obstacle in the path of a thorough-going 'People's War' against fascism and Nazism.

Hitler-Stalin Pact

It was onto this canvas that the the Hitler-Stalin pact was spilled in August 1939, though it was not until after the British and French declarations of war against Germany on 3rd September that this arrangement gave rise to a new attitude of Communist Parties towards the fascist states.⁵ In what appeared to be an astonishing policy U-turn, Moscow now condemned the conflict as an inter-imperialist war and urged Communists to resist their national governments' participation in the hostilities. It was stressed that fascist states were no worse than bourgeois democratic states, indeed, British capital had helped to build up Hitler and fascism as an anti-Soviet force, an experiment which backfired as these new forces developed into colonial rivals and turned against their sponsors. The CPGB's task therefore, was to expose these facts and work to undermine the British state, not encourage war against the fascist states.

The British government was accordingly attacked for its hypocrisy in portraying the war as one fought on behalf of democracy and self-determination, while Labour was denounced for being a 'tame opposition'.⁶ A statement on 'The Colonies and War', adopted by the Central Committee in December 1939, claimed that 'the people of India and the Colonies are not deceived by false slogans of war for democracy; they see no

⁴ Ibid., p.469.

⁵ Kevin Morgan, Against Fascism and War, Manchester University Press, 1989, pp.87-91.

⁶ Robin Page Arnot, 'The Communist Party and the Colonies', World News and Views, Vol. 20, No. 31, 24-8-40, pp.423-4.

reason why they should place their lives and their resources at the disposal of their foreign rulers, when in their own countries democracy and freedom are denied to them . . . The Colonial people have nothing to gain from another imperialist war, save a further loss of freedom and heavier burdens.'⁷ Communist literature of this time also stressed the adverse affects of the war on British workers. 'We and the colonial people must starve . . . in order to pay for the war and the profits which monopoly capital is making out of the war.'⁸

As the focus of Communist propaganda swung back onto the colonies, the colonial peoples were once again placed in the forefront of the struggle to end imperialism and topple the capitalist system. In this new stage of imperialist conflict, their conditions were 'even more intolerable', their determination to win independence greater than ever.⁹ In a statement on *The Colonies and War*, adopted by the CPGB's Central Committee, it was maintained that the war had awakened rebellion in every part of the British Empire, even those areas which had previously lacked a national consciousness - an argument which was vindicated by subsequent events, as nationalist and workers' movements developed in the African colonies.¹⁰

The Communist newspaper, *World News and Views* reported the 1939 Mombasa strike, a dispute sparked by dock workers' demands for higher wages which spread rapidly to other sections of the work force - a total of six thousand workers in all. This was met with force and repression by the authorities, as was the widespread labour unrest in Tanganyika

⁷ 'The Colonies and War', in *Labour Monthly*, Vol. 21, No. 12, December 1939, pp.751-2.

⁸ *The Empire and the War*, CPGB, n d, c1940, p.8.

⁹ Clemens Dutt, 'The Colonial Question and the War', in *Labour Monthly*, Vol. 22, No. 6, June 1940.

¹⁰ *Labour Monthly*, December 1939, op.cit.

which occurred soon afterwards¹¹ and the strike by Rhodesian copper miners during August 1940.¹²

The distressing economic and social situation in Jamaica, where high unemployment, low wages and increased taxation were having a radicalising effect on the local population, was also covered by communists.¹³ Michael Carritt reported on the huge amount of taxes and goods raised for the war effort in the colonies and the effect on the colonial peoples, giving the examples of Malaya, Trinidad and sub-Saharan Africa.¹⁴ He revealed the record profits reaped by Tate and Lyle in the West Indies, at a time when the people were starving¹⁵ and their civil liberties under attack.¹⁶ Colonial peoples were now considered to be 'front-line fighters'¹⁷ in the struggle to end imperialism and advance Socialism.

Repercussions

David Springhall, the CPGB member charged with the task of explaining the latest *volte face* by Moscow to his British comrades, urged them to understand that it was a decision based on the Soviet Union's need to react defensively to unfolding world events. He added that there was no question but that the Party, in implementing the new line, would continue to carry responsibility for the colonies and assist them in every way.¹⁸ But despite such efforts at reassurance, the directive stretched the loyalty of many key

¹¹ 'Labour Advances in East Africa', World News and Views, Vol. 44, No.19, 9-9-39, p.964. The newspaper subsequently reported that the Peoples' National Party of Jamaica had reversed its decision to shelve its demands for responsible self-government for the duration of the war, in the face of government intransigence. 'An Appeal from Jamaica', in World News and Views, Vol. 21, No. 6, 8-2-41, p.91.

¹² R K. Robertson, 'Strike of the Rhodesian Copper Miners', in World News and Views, Vol. 20, No. 34, 24-8-40, pp.463-4.

¹³ B. Ashe, 'Jamaica Feels the Pinch', World News and Views, Vol. 20, No. 24, 5-6-40, pp.30-1. The article stressed that the amount which the colony was expected to receive from the proposed Colonial Development Fund was unlikely to alter the economic situation to any great extent.

¹⁴ Michael Carritt, 'Allies - and Proud of it', in World News and Views, Vol. 20, No. 50, 14-12-40, pp 718-720. The article pointed out that a steep rise in the price of vital imported foodstuffs and the consequent drop in popular consumption was causing a very serious food situation to develop in Trinidad. See 'War, Food and Health in Trinidad', in *Ibid*.

¹⁵ Michael Carritt, 'West Indies and the Sugar Racket', in World News and Views, Vol. 20, No. 51, 21-12-40, p.731.

¹⁶ B. Ashe, 'The Attacks on Civil Liberties in the West Indies', in World News and Views, Vol. 20, No. 47, 23-11-40, pp.670-1.

¹⁷ The Empire and the War, op.cit., p.12.

¹⁸ J. Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., p.181.

members to breaking point and placed the CPGB under great strain. Several leading associates of the Party turned from it in disgust; John Strachey and Victor Gollancz, for example, believed the Communists to be guilty of a 'the worst betrayal of the working-class in modern history'.¹⁹

Harry Pollitt, whose pamphlet *How to Win the War* was published at the same time as the new line was conveyed from Moscow, was one of those most reluctant to accept the change of analysis. He was replaced as Party secretary by Palme Dutt²⁰ - who accommodated the policy change with rather more enthusiasm.²¹ Only a continuing belief in the central importance of the Soviet Union to the cause of international labour coupled with deep scepticism towards a British state perceived to be built on the subjugation of colonial peoples, allowed many who were repulsed by fascism and its allies to remain within the Party at this time.

Ben Bradley was one of those imprisoned for publicly expounding the new line. In May 1940, he and fellow Communist Arthur Clegg were arrested after speaking in support of Indian independence at separate Empire Day rallies. They were charged with attempting to cause a breach of the peace and gaoled for three and two months respectively.²² Yet Bradley's fortnightly *Colonial Information Bulletin*, journal of the Colonial Information Bureau, had been supportive of the war effort prior to its issue of 30th November 1939, after which the Party ceased publication.²³

It is perhaps of some significance that the Home Secretary at the time of Bradley's arrest was Sir John Anderson, an ex-Governor of Bombay with a hardline reputation. Anderson had expressed his approval of fascist regimes whilst in India and had acquired the

¹⁹ Quoted in *Ibid.*, p.192.

²⁰ Kevin Morgan, 1989, *op.cit.*, Chapters 4-6.

²¹ J. Callaghan, 1993, *op.cit.*, pp.181-190.

²² Jean Jones, 1994, *op.cit.*, p.28.

²³ S. Howe, *op.cit.*, p.119; Noreen Branson, *The History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1941-51*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1997, p.67.

nickname 'Black and Tan' Anderson during his period in Ireland after the First World War²⁴ - in many ways he typified the system which activists like Bradley had spent much of their lives opposing.

In a wider context, the Communists' policy change caused the Party to lose a great deal of sympathy in Britain - membership fell by about a third during this period - and placed it under threat of illegality. In an attempt to win back some of its ebbing support, the party launched the Peoples' Convention in September 1940. The strategy behind this initiative was to present a pacifist front - its stated aims being to defend the democratic rights and living standards of British workers and cultivate a pro-Soviet foreign policy.

The coalition Government was attacked during the campaign as a government of 'the rich and privileged, ruling the country in their own interests and against those of the masses of the people', the formation of which had destroyed the 'normal functioning of a Parliamentary Opposition'.²⁵ It was a position which attracted over two thousand delegates²⁶ to the inaugural conference, at which the speakers included Krishna Menon and Paul Robeson.²⁷ Although, in truth, its appeal did not extend much beyond pacifists, Communists and their sympathisers, the Convention did present an alternative to the coalition government's call for sacrifices in the prosecution of a just war. The conference was successful enough to sting the Government into issuing a ban on the *Daily Worker* and *The Week* in January 1941,²⁸ but other Party publications escaped proscription, presumably because they tended on the whole to avoid anti-war propaganda.

During 1940, most of the CPGB's coverage of colonial affairs was to be found in *Inside The Empire*, the first issue of which promised to 'shatter the smoke-screen of lies,

²⁴ M. Carritt, op.cit., p.154.

²⁵ 'The People's Convention', in *Labour Monthly*, Vol. 22, No. 11, November 1940, p.601.

²⁶ Purportedly representing around one million people.

²⁷ *Labour Monthly*, November 1940, op.cit., p.194.

²⁸ Patricia Cockburn, op.cit., p.276.

deception and suppression'²⁹ erected by the British Government, and publish the 'real facts' of what was happening to the peoples of the British Empire. The journal narrowly escaped a complete ban on its publication in January 1941, although its export continued to be prohibited.³⁰ In fact, the publication proved to be fairly restrained, tending to produce straightforward reports on conditions within the colonial Empire and often quoting from the British and colonial press.³¹

India

If the Soviet-German accomodation was virtually impossible to justify to the British public and a source of much soul-searching within the British CP, it was welcomed by the majority of colonial nationalists who perceived their chief adversary to be British imperialism. It also allowed the CPGB to support the INC's anti-war stance. In the years leading up to the outbreak of the Second World War - even as the British Government was practising a non-interventionist strategy with regard to German aggression and participating in the Munich negotiations - the INC's opposition to fascism had been clearly stated in numerous resolutions and speeches. But nationalist leaders' awareness of the fascist threat did not lessen their resistance to British imperialism. While Palme Dutt was able in June 1939 to 'definitely repudiate' the idea that fascism and imperialism were indistinguishable,³² Nehru made no distinction between the two in his presidential address to the Conference on Peace and Empire, held in London on July 15th and 16th, 1938. 'Fascism is indeed an intensified form of the same system which is imperialism', he maintained, 'you cannot distinguish between the two conceptions of fascism and empire'.³³

²⁹ R.P. Dutt, 'The Empire and War', in Inside the Empire, Vol. 1, No. 1, February 1940.

³⁰ Noreen Branson, 1997, op.cit., p.67.

³¹ The journal temporarily ceased publication during the blitz, reappearing in March 1943. Noreen Branson, The Communist Party of Great Britain 1941-51, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1997, p.67.

³² Minutes of a Central Committee Meeting, 8-6-39, Reel 10, (CPGBA).

³³ J. Nehru, Peace and Empire, India League, 1938, p.4.

The British Government could not claim to be ignorant of such sentiments; an INC resolution passed at the Haripura session in February 1938 had bluntly warned that 'In the event of an attempt being made to involve India in a war, this will be resisted.'³⁴ Thus, when the Viceroy proclaimed India to be a belligerent only hours after the British Prime Minister's speech in the House of Commons declaring a state of war between Britain and Germany, nationalist opinion was incensed. Without consent or consultation, India's economic and manpower resources were used to prosecute the war. The Government of India promulgated Ordinances which severely restricted the freedoms of the Indian people and - through the Government of India Amending Bill - took measures to limit and circumscribe the powers and activities of the provincial governments.

On the 15th September, 1939, in its Resolution on India and War, Congress condemned Nazi ideology and fascism but declared that 'India cannot associate herself in a war said to be for democratic freedom when that very freedom is denied to her.'³⁵ The organisation invited the British to 'declare in unequivocal terms what their war aims are in regard to democracy and imperialism and the new order that is envisaged, in particular, how these aims are going to apply to India and to be given effect in the present. Do they include the elimination of imperialism and the treatment of India as a free nation whose policy will be guided in accordance with the wishes of her people?'³⁶

In his reply, the Viceroy merely reaffirmed the old pledge to grant India Dominion Status in due course and blamed communal disunity for the delay in conceding self-determination, a response which did not satisfy even the most moderate opinion in India.³⁷ 'It goes without saying', Lord Linlithgow declared in summer 1940, that the

³⁴ Ibid, p.28.

³⁵ *INC and War*, Congress Resolution, 15-9-39, p.13.

³⁶ Quoted in R. Palme Dutt, *India Today*, Victor Gollancz, London, 1940, pp.13-14.

³⁷ In protest at this dismissal of Indian views, Congress Governments resigned from nine of the eleven provinces at the beginning of November 1939, and Jinnah and his supporters in the Muslim League subsequently followed suit. Nehru scathingly predicted that an India under Dominion status would be ruled by 'bejewelled maharajas, belted knights, European industrial and commercial magnates, big landlords and taluqadars, Indian industrialists, representatives of the imperial service, and a few commoner mortals', all intent on preserving British interests. (J. Nehru, *The Parting of the Ways*, Lindsay Drummond Ltd., 1940.)

British government 'could not contemplate transfer of their present responsibilities for the peace and welfare of India to any system of government whose authority is directly denied by large and powerful elements in India's national life. Nor could they be parties to the coercion of such elements into submission to such a government.'³⁸

It was an argument repudiated by British Communists, who blamed economic inequalities and the Government's divisive policies for much of the communal strife in India.³⁹

William Gallagher rejected the interpretation of India as a hopelessly divided society in a House of Commons debate held on the 26th October, 1939. He insisted that the INC represented the legitimate demands of the Indian people for freedom and self-determination and must be recognised as the decisive political force in India. If Britain was fighting this war to defend democracy, he reasoned, it followed that India must be given her freedom.⁴⁰

During 1940 widespread strikes and civil disobedience were met by a series of police raids in which Congress leaders, Socialists, Communists, trade union and peasant leaders were arrested and gaoled. For Indian Communists, the Second World War offered an opportunity to direct the nation onto the path of revolutionary struggle; it was a challenge which the colonial state was determined to meet. The Governor of Madras, speaking on the 3rd of December, 1940, urged that the 'hidden organisers' of the Communist movement 'be tracked down, and every effort made to protect society from their

His vision of India as a free, united, democratic country, closely associated in a world federation with other independent Eastern nations such as China, Ceylon, Burma, Afghanistan and Persia and his desire to 'cut adrift' from the financial domination of the City of London, mirrored that of the CPGB.

³⁸ Viceroy's Reply, in INC and War, op.cit., p.19. He was supported by Lord Zetland, Secretary of State for India, who maintained in an interview with the Sunday Times that 'there are great and important sections of the Indian people themselves who refuse to acquiesce in the hegemony of the country which Congress are claiming'. Quoted in Notes on India, No. 10, January-February 1941, India League, London.

³⁹ Muslims had come late to the fields of business and education and suffered economically because of this.

⁴⁰ Notes on India, No. 8, January-February 1940, India League, London.

misguided and insidious attempts.⁴¹ Among those arrested were B.T. Ranadive, S.A. Dange, R.S. Nimbkar and S.S. Mirajkar, all veterans of the Meerut Conspiracy Trial.⁴²

New Allies

CPGB support of the Indian nationalists at this time was expressed most strongly by Harry Pollitt in the June 1941 edition of *Labour Monthly*. 'We hope', he wrote, that the 'mighty wave of revolt that is now sweeping that great country will succeed in finding the road to the complete victory over British imperialism.'⁴³ As in 1939, Pollitt's words narrowly preceded a drastic change in Comintern policy. The commencement of Hitler's Russian campaign⁴⁴ on the 22nd. June, 1941, heralded the entry of the Soviet Union into the war and the Allied camp. According to the Comintern, the attack on Soviet Russia had transformed the character of the imperialist war into a People's War.

The Anglo-Soviet Pact was signed on 12th July, following which the CPGB wholeheartedly embraced the war effort, campaigning for a united fight against fascism, and in defence of democracy and the Soviet Union. Over the next two years, as the Soviet people battled against the Nazi onslaught, the British CP was a leading voice in the call for the Allies to move from a defensive to an offensive strategy, to begin the Second Front in Europe.⁴⁵

Now it was important to strengthen the coalition Government as a government of national unity. In May 1941, Dutt had portrayed Churchill as an 'imperialist swashbuckler . . .the

⁴¹ Quoted in *NewsIndia*, Vol. 3, No. 1, January 1941, India League, p.21.

⁴² One of those charged with criminal conspiracy and the making and possessing of prejudicial literature - namely copies of *Labour Monthly* and Molotov's speeches - in what became known as the Madras Conspiracy Case, was the former president of the Cambridge Union, Mohan Kumaramangalam. *NewsIndia*, Vol. 3, No. 7, September -November 1941, India League, p.20

⁴³ *Labour Monthly*, June 1941, p.265.

⁴⁴ Code-named Operation Barbarossa.

⁴⁵ During this period, the Party was able to rally up to 50,000 for Second Front demonstrations, at which Labour, Liberal and even Conservative M.P.s spoke. See R. Palme Dutt, *Britain in the World Front*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1942, p.208; Douglas Hyde, *I Believed*, The Reprint Society Ltd., London, 1952, p.183.

enemy of the workers';⁴⁶ the following year he wrote, 'The whole nation recognises that the Prime Minister, Mr. Churchill, stands for complete victory over Hitler, for maintenance of the alliance of the United Nations, and for rejection of every proposal of appeasement with the Nazi gang.'⁴⁷ But this development did not constitute an admission that previous policy was wrong; Dutt went on to argue that the Soviet-German Pact had smashed the policy of the Munichites and won time for the Soviet Union to equip itself for the war. Furthermore, 'the common front against fascist war and aggression' was 'still incomplete, still full of imperfections.'⁴⁸ The fight against pro-fascist forces within the Government and ruling-class which had occupied a large place in Communist arguments before September 1939, was now rekindled. Figures such as Leo Amery, Lord Halifax, Lord Simon, Sir James Grigg and Sir Samuel Hoare were all regarded with suspicion.

This policy, and perhaps more importantly, the Soviet war record, brought a remarkable upturn in the fortunes of the Party in Britain, with individual membership reaching around 50,000 by 1943,⁴⁹ the year in which the Comintern was dissolved. But the position did not rest easily with the demands of the anti-imperialist struggle, and the anti-war movement in the colonies now presented a problem for the CPGB. Communist support of colonial independence movements was no longer based on their capacity to topple the British Empire; but on the premise that self-determination was essential if the people were to be persuaded as to the deadly nature of the fascist threat and the necessity of mobilising behind the Allied war effort. Nehru, who was himself imprisoned for four years in November 1940,⁵⁰ declared after the Soviet Union entered the war, that 'Only freedom and the conviction that they are fighting for their own freedom can make a people fight as the Chinese and Russians have fought.'⁵¹ This was what the CPGB stressed continuously after 22 June 1941; India would fight, if India was free to choose.

⁴⁶ Quoted in J. Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., p.196.

⁴⁷ R.P. Dutt, Africa, Europe, Victory, CPGB, 1942, p.13.

⁴⁸ R.P. Dutt, 1942, op.cit., p.1.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p.207.

⁵⁰ His ninth gaol term.

⁵¹ J. Nehru, What India Wants, India League, London, 1942.

Dutt made the point in *Britain In The World Front*, published in 1942, that the Atlantic Charter of August 1931 had supported the right of all peoples to choose the form of government under which they will live. Churchill however, had excluded India, Burma and other parts of the British Empire from this principle.⁵² The loss of Burma and Malaya, the fall of Singapore to the Japanese in February 1942, was therefore seen as a warning; 'The peoples of these countries could have been won for full co-operation, and the people and resources rallied in co-operation with us to defend their country if their right to freedom had been declared'.⁵³ It was imperative that the British Government realised why these countries were lost and avoid the same occurring elsewhere in the Empire. The collaboration of the colonial peoples in the war effort had to be won 'on the basis of their own understanding of their own interests, as voluntary allies, and not as servants called on to give their lives in the interests of their masters'.⁵⁴

The Party argued that the path of democratic anti-fascist advance in the West Indies needed to be pressed forward by the 'immediate establishment of full self-government'. In the African colonies, the way forward lay in the extension of civil rights, rights of organisation and of a free press, the release of political prisoners, removal of racial laws, labour and social legislation and economic assistance.⁵⁵ The Communist press also reported the intensified repression in Africa as a result of wartime conditions.⁵⁶ By 1944, they were expressing doubts that the African peoples would be granted their freedom after the war and calling on the labour movement to insist that the principles of the Atlantic Charter be implemented in regard to the African colonies.⁵⁷

⁵² R.P. Dutt, 1942, op.cit., p.109.

⁵³ Draft Document on the Colonial Question, CPGB. 1942, p.2, 21B 2b (RBP).

⁵⁴ R.P. Dutt, 1942, op.cit., p.103.

⁵⁵ R.P. Dutt, 1942, op.cit., p.111.

⁵⁶ J. Shields, 'New Perspectives in Africa', *World News and Views*, Vol. 24, No. 40, 30-9-44, p.316.

⁵⁷ J. Shields, 'The Future of the African Colonies', *World News and Views*, Vol. 24, No. 23, 3-6-44, p.80.

The refusal of the British government to concede independence was losing valuable allies, the Communists insisted, notably Nehru - 'one of the world's most pronounced anti-fascists'.⁵⁸ However, despite this verbal pressure for a new British policy in India, they also argued that the colonial people could not make their involvement in the anti-fascist fight *conditional* on the granting of independence. In Palme Dutt's words, 'The interests of . . . all the colonial peoples, as of all the peoples of the world, is bound up with the victory of the peoples against fascism; that interest is absolute and unconditional, and does not depend on any measures their rulers may promise or concede'.⁵⁹ At this juncture, independence was considered possible only for those strong enough to withstand the fascist threat. As Dutt explained, even in India the Communists 'support the demand for independence . . . (only) on the basis of taking into account the world situation and the ability to maintain the independence against fascism'.⁶⁰

Concern at the implications of this shift in emphasis caused Reginald Bridgeman to express reservations over the content of the draft document on the Colonial Question prepared for the 1942 CPGB Annual Conference. It was important, he wrote to Harry Pollitt, that the Party did not give the impression that its approach 'is primarily governed by the desire to enlist all colonial peoples in the struggle to smash Fascism, rather than by the determination boldly to proclaim in Britain that the immediate need as far as all the nations, free and subject, is (sic) concerned is the liberation of the colonial peoples from alien determination'. The right of the colonial peoples to freedom should be 'plainly announced as a matter of principle by the CPGB before the question of the importance of their participation in the fight against Fascism is defined'.⁶¹ His suggestion was politely received by Pollitt,⁶² but not acted upon. Bridgeman subsequently noted that 'as at present published the Reports of the Conference appear to me to be hardly adequate in

⁵⁸ *NewsIndia*, Vol. 4, May 1942, India League.

⁵⁹ Rajani Palme Dutt, 'Notes of the Month, in *Labour Monthly*, September 1941.

⁶⁰ Minutes of a Central Committee Meeting, 8-6-39, Reel 10, (CPGBA).

⁶¹ Letter, Reginald Bridgeman to Harry Pollitt, 21-5-42, 21B, 2b, (RBP).

⁶² Letter, Harry Pollitt to Reginald Bridgeman, 29-5-42, 21B, 2b, (RBP).

bringing out the importance of freedom for the subject peoples in reference to a maximum anti-Axis effort.'⁶³

Ironically, the reversal of the Comintern's previous instructions to the Indian Communist Party fell to Harry Pollitt - the CPGB's General Secretary who had opposed the 1939 Pact and was removed from office for his pains. He was instructed to write to the imprisoned Indian Communist leaders informing them of the new line⁶⁴ and urging them to give uncompromising support to the war effort against Nazi Germany and its fascist allies.

As with previous policy shifts, Indian Communists initially resisted the changes, but by mid-1942 they had wholeheartedly adopted a pro-war position. P.C. Joshi was able to write in 1942 that 'War now unites the nation in a just cause, for the nation must perish if the war is lost. The purpose now becomes positive and immediate - Victory; and the activities of all are related to one single issue.'⁶⁵ The CPI was rewarded for its co-operation during that year, when it was legalised by the British government and many of its leaders were released. Although the Party's membership grew as a consequence of its privileged legality, it alienated many of its nationalist sympathisers, particularly as the difference between the positions of the Communists and nationalists was brought into sharp relief with the initiation of the Quit India campaign in August of that same year, following the failure of the Cripps Mission.

Cripps Mission

On March 11th, 1942, Churchill announced that Sir Stafford Cripps, the Lord Privy Seal, was being sent to India with a set of proposals for the colony's future. Cripps was widely regarded as a friend of India - during earlier discussions in the House of Commons on

⁶³ Letter, Reginald Bridgeman to Harry Pollitt, 5-6-42, 21B, 2b, (RBP).

⁶⁴ S. Roy, op.cit., pp.263-5.

⁶⁵ P.C. Joshi, The Indian Communist Party - its policy and work in the war of liberation, CPGB, 1942, p.7.

Indian opposition to the war effort,⁶⁶ he had blamed the uncompromising attitude of the British government for the impasse and declared the communal strife argument invalid. Democracy, he had warned, could not be invoked to justify depriving the majority of its rights in order to protect a minority.⁶⁷ However, the proposals of his Mission - which were made public on March 29th - were rebuffed by all the main Indian political parties..

Congress leaders rejected as undemocratic the blueprint for a constitution-making body and condemned provisions for the possible future division of India ⁶⁸ These latter measures were also criticised by the Muslim League, which complained that they did not go far enough in meeting its recently-formulated demand for a separate Pakistan nation. However, the major stumbling block, as senior Labour Party figures later admitted, concerned India's defence.⁶⁹ Nehru, who envisaged the development of a citizen's army, maintained that proposals relating to defence rendered the transfer of power illusory. Under the Cripps plan - which was not intended to be implemented until after the war was over - Britain would retain control of all the principal areas ⁷⁰ leaving the Indian Defence Minister with only minor responsibilities. Cripps was also accused of reneging on an earlier commitment by refusing in the final stages of the talks to give any assurances on the Viceroy's use of veto and powers of interference.

In answer to his critics, Cripps raised the spectre of communal divisions⁷¹ and, contradicting his earlier stance, warned of the 'rule of the tyrannical majority'.⁷² But the

⁶⁶ According to the Prime Minister, the purpose of the Mission was to give precise form to the general declaration of 6th August 1940, which had formulated the Government of India's policy.

⁶⁷ Notes on India, No. 8, India League, January- February 1940. The House of Commons Debate was held on 26-10-39.

⁶⁸ Under Cripps' proposals, the unelected Princes who ruled the Indian States would have been empowered to nominate representatives to the Constituent Assembly and, at the same time as enjoying influence through their nominees, these rulers would also have the option to remain outside the proposed Indian Union. J. Nehru, An Authoritative Statement on the Breakdown of the New Delhi Negotiations, India League, April 1942.

⁶⁹ Joint meeting of the Labour Party's International sub-committee and the India Committee of the P.L.P., 13-10-43, Box J88, File 1, Fabian Colonial Bureau Papers (FCBP), Nuffield College Library, Oxford.

⁷⁰ The British Commander-in-Chief, George Wavell, also assumed the post of Defence Minister.

⁷¹ H. Palmer, India, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1942, p.33.

⁷² 'Nehru Answers Cripps', NewsIndia, Vol. 4, May 1942.

CPGB, which saw the failure of the Cripps Mission as a major strategic defeat for the alliance against Fascism, argued that the Mission had failed, not because of communal differences, but because demands from all sections of Indian opinion for the formation of a responsible National Government had been refused.⁷³

While rejecting the Cripps Mission as an exercise undertaken purely to establish an 'unanswerable case against future critics of British power in India',⁷⁴ the CPGB was also highly critical of Gandhi's campaign which, they reasoned, would allow reactionary elements to accuse the nationalist movement of surrendering to fascism. Non-cooperation was seen by British Communists to be 'a disastrous step';⁷⁵ it was vital that the nationalist movement should not use the British government's rebuff of India's aspirations to independence to adopt a policy which would leave the Indian people 'passive spectators while the fate of the world is being decided'.⁷⁶ Besides, there were wider concerns, as Harry Pollitt explained to Nehru; 'I hate British Imperialism as deeply as you yourself do . . . But . . . when Socialism is being butchered and battered as it is in the Soviet Union, when our Soviet comrades are dying in their millions to hold the one-sixth of the earth that is ours, I am ready to cooperate with all who are prepared to fight against fascism'.⁷⁷

CPI wages the People's War

As a combination of war conditions, political conflict and inefficient administration took hold in India, food prices rose by 1,200%, giving rise to the devastating Bengal famine of 1943-4.⁷⁸ Conditions of such poverty and hardship prevailed that some of the British servicemen stationed there were moved to reassess their view of British rule in India. In letters home, they wrote of men, women and children dropping in the streets from

⁷³ R. Palme Dutt, 1942, op.cit., p.110.

⁷⁴ R.P. Dutt, 'Notes of the Month', in Labour Monthly, September 1942, p.264. Ben Bradley attacked the proposals in a pamphlet entitled India: What We Must Do and the Party's 1942 Conference adopted an emergency resolution urging that negotiations with the INC be reopened.

⁷⁵ Clemens Dutt, 'India and Freedom', in Labour Monthly, August 1942, p.247.

⁷⁶ Ibid, p.250.

⁷⁷ Quoted in Kevin Morgan, Harry Pollitt, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1993, p.130.

⁷⁸ Krishna Menon, 'Famine in India', in Labour Monthly, October 1943.

exhaustion and hunger, of troops being prevented from helping the local Food Committees and of the British Government's responsibility for the situation.⁷⁹ Bradley, who was familiar with the system operating in India, attempted to publicise the people's suffering⁸⁰ the cause of which, he believed, ultimately lay with the British Government's failure to deal with Indian affairs competently.⁸¹

In the wake of its Quit India campaign the INC suffered intensified repression from the authorities; its leaders were imprisoned, severe penalties were introduced - whipping was administered for offences arising from political disturbances - while a news blackout was operated by the British press to screen the discontent from the public. In a telegram to the British Labour Party, the General Secretary of the AITUC, N.M. Joshi, deplored the intransigence of the authorities and urged the immediate release of Mahatma Gandhi and the other political prisoners as an essential step towards political pacification.⁸²

Under these circumstances, the spectacle of a CPI restored to legality and rapidly expanding its membership through cooperation with the war effort, was an outrage to the nationalists. The CPI, which in compliance with instructions from the CPGB not to be deflected from the fight against fascism had urged Congress to negotiate a settlement with Cripps, reacted to disturbances which followed the arrests of Congress leaders in August 1942 by condemning the 'chaotic outbursts',⁸³ and blaming provocateurs for trying to instigate acts of violence. It was imperialist policy to goad the people into anarchy which it could meet with force in order to crush the working-class, the Indian Communist

⁷⁹ Arthur Olorenshaw, Our Forces in India, CPGB, c1944.

⁸⁰ He blamed the Zamindari system of land tenancy, the intransigence and complacency of the Secretary of State, Leo Amery, and opposition by Government officials to the People's Food Committees, in which communists played a leading role.

⁸¹ Ben Bradley, India's Famine, the facts, CPGB, November 1943.

⁸² Joint meeting of Labour's International sub-committee and the India Committee of the PLP, op.cit., (FCBP). When, in November 1943, Home Secretary Herbert Morrison announced that Oswald Mosley was to be released from gaol on health grounds, the Communist M.P. William Gallagher demanded to know why he was afforded such treatment when Gandhi, who was also in poor health, remained in detention. H.F. Srebrnik, London Jews and British Communism 1935-45, Vallentine Mitchell and Co. Ltd., Essex, 1995, p.61.

⁸³ India's Problems, CPGB, 1942, p.7.

leaders claimed; the only way to react was to build national unity in order to hold the Indian front against the Fascist invaders.⁸⁴

The CPI's line - elaborated in P.C. Joshi's booklet *Forward To Freedom* - called for the unity of all political sections on a common platform of anti-fascism. Such an alignment could press for a National Government of India whilst giving full cooperation to the war effort and the mobilisation of the people.⁸⁵ The people's war against fascism, the CPI was forced to argue, would transform itself spontaneously into a war of national liberation at some unspecified stage in its development.

Furious nationalist leaders denounced this strategy as a form of collaboration with India's imperialist enemies and subsequently barred Communists from Congress membership.⁸⁶ But far from being constrained by the bitter response of nationalists to their newly acquired 'respectability', Indian Communists went even further in their prosecution of the 'People's War' by supporting the demands of the Muslim League - an organisation previously condemned as a tool of British imperialism - for a separate nation. In a resolution adopted in September 1942, the Party not only accepted the legitimacy of a Pakistan nation, but went so far as to recognise a total of seventeen separate nationalities within India's borders.

The CPI's theoretical position was set out by G. Adhikari in a speech to an enlarged meeting of the CPI's Central Committee in September 1942. This cited the Marxist theory of development of a nation - that nationalities 'emerge and grow in the process of historical evolution.' Invoking Stalin's authority to support his reasoning, Adhikari declared that the argument must develop beyond that put by Dutt in *India Today*, which

⁸⁴ P.C. Joshi, 1942, op.cit., p.16.

⁸⁵ *Labour Monthly*, September 1942, op.cit., pp.263-5.

⁸⁶ Calls for Congress-League agreement were attacked by Nehru, who considered the CPI to be 'committing suicide'. *India's Problems*, op.cit., p.28.

depicted India as a single entity ranged against British imperialism, and recognise the 'awakenings to national consciousness of new nationalities.'⁸⁷

The position was based, at least in part, on political expediency; essentially because the Muslim League favoured the war effort and also because the Party was strongest in those regions where separatist movements existed. Following independence, it was able to exploit regional differences in the face of a national government struggling to unify the nation, but for now the CPI stressed the increase in support for the League which they construed to be evidence of a developing political consciousness among the Muslim population.⁸⁸

The CPI's stance confounded the Indian Communist Party's British mentors, although John Callaghan quotes correspondence between Dutt and P.C. Joshi, the CPI leader, which suggests that the CPGB encouraged such policy innovations by default; concentrating on the campaign for independence while the CPI was expected to focus on support for the war.⁸⁹ The CPGB, which looked exclusively to the Congress left for allies, warned that a considerable amount of literature was being distributed among the Muslim population by the forces of fascism in India, who claimed to be the 'defenders of Islam'. It was significant, the Party argued, that this propaganda concentrated its fire against Nehru as the principal enemy.⁹⁰ Nehru himself was greatly alarmed by the development⁹¹ and he found a strong sympathiser in Dutt, who believed fervently in the desirability of a single, unified Indian nation, and had earlier urged Congress to make 'far-reaching concessions' for the sake of national unity.⁹²

⁸⁷ 'Pakistan and National Unity', in Labour Monthly, Vol. 25, No. 3, March 1943, pp.87-91.

⁸⁸ Congress claimed that the bulk of Muslim opinion did not support the League or its aims - the incumbent president of the INC, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, was himself a Muslim and in the North-West Frontier Province Muslims had formed a Congress Ministry. See Howard Whitten, Muslims of India and the Muslim League, Peace News Ltd., n.d., c.1942.

⁸⁹ J. Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., p.200.

⁹⁰ Minutes of a Central Committee Meeting, 8-6-39, Reel 10, (CPGBA).

⁹¹ Following his release from gaol in August 1945, Nehru contacted the CPGB to express his concern. 'They (the CPI) have worsened the communal problem by their attitude.' He wrote, 'Communists who have joined the Muslim League appear to be more rabid Leaguers than others'. S. Gopal, op.cit., p.305.

⁹² Rajani Palme Dutt, 'Notes of the Month', in Labour Monthly, September 1942, p.266.

Despite the hiatus in nationalist-Communist relations which resulted from the CPI's enthusiastic pursuit of Comintern directives, a complete breakdown was avoided, primarily because of the CPGB's consistent support of Indian independence. Although coverage by the Communist press of colonial issues in general during this period was poor, *Labour Monthly* devoted considerable space to Dutt's comments on India. 'When all the charges and criticisms in the world have been laid against the Congress leadership and tactics,' he wrote in September 1942, 'the fact remains that the Congress was asking for the recognition of a free India as an ally of the United Nations; and this demand, because it was accompanied with the threat of civil disobedience in the event of refusal, has been met with police cells, lathi charges, whipping ordinances and firing squads'.⁹³

Two years and a policy U-turn after publication of *India Today*, Dutt was able to denounce the situation there as one which aided the fascist enemy. British imperialism, he claimed, would 'rather lose the colonial territories temporarily to the fascist invaders than yield power to the colonial peoples themselves'.⁹⁴ His articles called for the formation of an emergency Indian National Government which could rally the Indian people in the common struggle for the defence of India, the victory of the United Nations and for Indian freedom.⁹⁵

As a consequence of such analysis, the British CP's relationships with important Indian nationalists like Nehru and his ally, Krishna Menon, remained friendly. Dutt was able to maintain a co-operative relationship with Nehru, who confirmed his continued support of the Soviet Union following his release from prison in December 1941,⁹⁶ while Menon

⁹³ Ibid., p.259.

⁹⁴ R. Palme Dutt, *Britain in the World Front*, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1942, p.108.

⁹⁵ Rajani Palme Dutt, 'Notes of the Month', in *Labour Monthly*, June 1944, pp.163-4.

⁹⁶ H. Palmer, op.cit., pp.29-30. Nehru's early release was partly a result of public pressure in Britain, where a campaign for the release of political prisoners in India was launched by Michael Foot M.P. at a public meeting on 23rd. November, 1940. The India League set up a campaign sub-committee which included Reginald Sorensen M.P. as chair and Krishna Menon as secretary. See *NewsIndia*, Vol. 3, No. 2, February 1941.

became particularly close to the CPGB during the Communists anti-war period of 1939-41.⁹⁷

The India League secretary was a regular contributor to *Labour Monthly* and it was a measure of his understanding of the Communist position that his articles - which expounded the nationalist view of independence as a precondition for India's participation in the war effort - were all written after the Communists had changed to a pro-war policy.⁹⁸ Menon was a valuable contact for the CPGB, he held various government posts after independence, including that of Minister of Defence, and may have continued to provide Dutt with information on Indian and international affairs whilst in office.⁹⁹

The Colonies: the way forward

The significance of the change which was instituted in Communist politics after the Soviet Union's entry into the Second World War was manifest in the decision to dissolve the Comintern in May-June 1943. Defended by Stalin as a means of facilitating 'the work of patriots of all countries for uniting the progressive forces of their respective countries . . . into a single camp of national liberation',¹⁰⁰ it was an act which announced conclusively that the movement had turned from the path of world revolution. This had profound implications for the tiny CPGB. Shorn of its revolutionary centre yet continuously rebuffed by the Labour Party,¹⁰¹ the British CP clung to the chimera of international co-operation symbolised by the Teheran agreement, negotiated between the three major powers in November-December 1943.

⁹⁷ When Ben Bradley and Arthur Clegg were released from prison in the summer of 1940, Menon arranged a dance evening in their honour at the Indian High Commission in Aldwych. (Author's interview with A. Clegg, op.cit.) Menon's connection with the CPGB cost him the Labour Party nomination as prospective Parliamentary candidate for Dundee. See S. Howe, op.cit., p.130

⁹⁸ Both the articles and the general tone of India League publications were sympathetic towards the Soviet Union - The India League published *NewsIndia*, a news bulletin, and *League News*, which was printed every two weeks primarily for members, in addition to various pamphlets.

⁹⁹ John Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., p.257.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Claudin, op.cit., p.45.

¹⁰¹ The Labour Party, which tended to regard the CPGB as a 'very different and very much less responsible body than the Communist Party of the Soviet Union', continued to reject Communist attempts at affiliation. Report of the Annual Labour Party Conference, 1943, p.166, (LPA).

Participation by the CPGB in the wartime united front did not leave the Churchill coalition totally unopposed, however. The ILP mounted a challenge to the war policy of the government, as did the Trotskyists and Common Wealth,¹⁰² a new party which emerged in 1942. This organisation, which placed Indian independence at the centre of its programme, succeeded in attracting several left-wing intellectuals, including the former CP members, Tom Driberg and Tom Wintringham, and achieved a number of by-election successes. The proposal by Common Wealth to establish a new, narrower form of Popular Front¹⁰³ was attacked by Communists, who feared that it would split the socialist ranks and disrupt the existing unity against Fascism. Besides, the new party - which leaned towards a Christian socialist stance - adopted a hostile attitude to Communism, arguing that political democracy did not exist in the Soviet Union.¹⁰⁴

In 1944, the CPGB's Executive Committee issued a major policy document entitled *The Colonies: The Way Forward*. This document, while attacking British imperialism on several fronts, was far less inflammatory than the rhetoric of the inter-war years. The Party's stated task was now to 'win the Labour and progressive movement as speedily as possible to support the demands of the colonial peoples, and at the same time to put forward a practical policy of support of these demands.'¹⁰⁵ The arrest or regression of economic development in the colonies as a result of British rule was discussed, as was the creaming off of superprofits by monopoly capitalism and the detrimental effects of imperialism on the British worker.¹⁰⁶ But there was little reference to radical political change; the emphasis being on economic and industrial development, social services, workers' rights and constitutional reform as a first step towards a future, as yet unspecified

¹⁰² Common Wealth was formed in July 1942, from an amalgamation of Forward March, a group inspired by the former Liberal M.P. and baronet, Sir Richard Acland, and the 1941 Committee, led by the writer, J.B. Priestly.

¹⁰³ It was envisaged that this would be drawn from the labour movement, Socialists, Communists, radical Liberals and Common Wealth's own constituent groups.

¹⁰⁴ R. Page Arnot, *What Is Common Wealth?*, CPGB, 1943.

¹⁰⁵ Ben Bradley, *Colonies and the Future*, CPGB, 1944, p.3.

¹⁰⁶ *Colonies: The Way Forward*, CPGB, 1944, pp.8-10, 7-11, 52-3.

date of independence. The concept of colonial revolution as a means of achieving freedom for the subject peoples and ultimately destroying world capitalism did not inform this moderate programme, which adopted a particularly conciliatory tone towards the Labour Party. The 'principles of democracy and freedom being applied to all peoples', it claimed, was the 'true expression of Labour outlook'.¹⁰⁷

Conclusion

Prior to August 1939, Communists believed they were conducting a 'struggle on two fronts' - against both the forces of fascism and the imperialism of the Western powers. With Moscow's designation of the Second World War as an imperialist war and its claim that Hitler was pressing for peace however, this policy was no longer valid and the CPGB was directed to switch the focus of its attack onto British and French imperialism alone, a position which caused much soul-searching among Party members.

In contrast, colonial activists welcomed the new direction as a return to a more full-blooded anti-imperialist stance. Indian Communists in particular initially saw the war as an opportunity to lead the working-class in a nation-wide uprising and intensified their activities accordingly, until halted by a Government offensive which saw most of their leaders gaoled. Ironically, the CPI was reprieved by the pro-war policy adopted by Moscow following Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union, although its progress under these conditions left a legacy of bitterness among the Indian nationalist movement and caused the CPGB - which continued to adopt a co-operative attitude towards left nationalists - great concern.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 1944, pp.54-55. Communists responded positively to the British Government's plans for Africa, for example. The report on 'Labour Supervision in the British Empire 1937-43', was cited as evidence that the Government was prepared to encourage the growth of colonial trade unions, the 1940 Colonial Welfare and Development Act allegedly recognised British responsibility for conditions in the colonies while a document entitled 'Mass Education in African Society' advocated the widespread development of education. All these measures were welcomed by the CPGB. See E. Palmer, 'Colonial Education', in *Labour Monthly*, April 1944, pp.124-125.

Throughout 1942-45, far less attention was paid to colonial issues by the CPGB. This was due in large measure to a reluctance by Communists to upset the Soviet Union's Western allies by raising the spectre of anti-imperialist revolt. It was also a fact that the Party suffered from the desertion during the 1930s of some of its most important African activists and that war-time conditions made contact with Party sympathisers in Britain's African and West Indian colonies exceptionally difficult. The Party itself remained concerned that 'we have not secured the fullest realisation of the importance of the colonial question'; existing members too easily forgot the Leninist principles on which their movement's anti-colonialism was built whilst the Party needed to equip new members with the Party line on the imperial and colonial question.¹⁰⁸

Communists within the British armed forces stationed in India, Egypt and the Middle East did conduct some valuable educational work among both the local populations and their fellow servicemen and women.¹⁰⁹ But this was mainly undertaken on an individual basis and had limited impact. Overall, the most attention to colonial issues was devoted to India by Dutt in the pages of *Labour Monthly*, where he endeavoured to preach unqualified support of the war effort while maintaining that Indian self-government was a prerequisite for its efficient prosecution in South Asia.

¹⁰⁸ Draft Document on the Colonial Question for the CPGB's National Conference, 1942, 21B 2b, (RBP).

¹⁰⁹ For accounts of these activities see Clive Branson, British Soldier in India, the letters of Clive Branson, CPGB, 1944; Richard Kisch, The Days of the Good Soldiers, communists in the armed forces in World War Two, Journeyman Press, 1985. CPGB members Bill Carritt, brother of Michael, and Jim Fyrth both established contact with the CPI while stationed in India. See Noreen Branson, 1997, op.cit., pp.65-6.

CHAPTER SEVEN: COLD WAR AND COLONIAL INDEPENDENCE

After a brief flirtation with the idea of a continuation of the wartime coalition,¹ the Communists welcomed Labour's victory in July 1945. In the August 1945 edition of *Labour Monthly*, Palme Dutt declared that Labour's victory was a 'glorious political leap forward in Britain . . . the sequel of military victory in the people's war of the United Nations against fascism.'² There was no critique of Labour's programme, *Let us Face the Future*, for its omission of a commitment to timetables for colonial freedom; Communists merely called for the practical implementation of the Party's pledge on self-government for India, Burma and Ceylon.

Although Britain's growing dependence on US aid was a source of concern to British Communists and the Labour left alike, even this had positive aspects. Dutt, for example, saw the anti-protectionist conditions attached to the American Loan as evidence of America's adoption of an 'aggressive imperialist world role',³ but noted with satisfaction that it also marked the end of Chamberlainite visions of the empire as a closed bloc. Accentuating the positive was a condition of the wartime alliance, perhaps, but it also contained a purely domestic element in that Labour was given the benefit of the doubt as it implemented its legislative programme. Great popular hopes resided in this administration which the Communists probably shared. But Labour's foreign policy, with its high military spending, was identified as a problem from the outset and was said to be holding back its ability to implement its domestic programme.⁴

¹ Douglas Hyde, op.cit., p.200.

² R.P. Dutt, 'Notes of the Month, in *Labour Monthly* August 1945, p.225.

³ R.P. Dutt, 'Notes of the Month', in *Labour Monthly*, January 1946, pp.8-9, 11 and December 1945, p.359.

⁴ Maurice Dobb, 'The Economic Situation and the Labour Party', in *Labour Monthly*, October 1945, p.300-302; John Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., p.219.

Economic Problems

There is no doubt that Britain's economy was in poor shape after the war; export levels had fallen sharply,⁵ around a quarter of her pre-war foreign investments had been sold and the country had accumulated massive debts in the form of sterling liabilities.⁶ During the early post-war years, the country's economic problems manifested themselves through a series of balance of payments crises which dominated the political agenda. The balance of payments deficit was caused in the main by two factors; the outflow of British capital through the sterling area⁷ - which carried no controls on foreign investment - and the scale of government overseas expenditure

The sterling area, which was justified during the war as a means of gathering resources for the fight against fascism, involved the pooling of colonial hard currency resources which Britain could then buy at a fixed rate of exchange whilst crediting the colonies with sterling balances. When the Attlee administration assumed power, it decided against policies which would reduce its sterling balance liabilities,⁸ agreeing instead that the problem was 'basically how to prevent accumulated sterling from being liquidated against imports'.⁹

⁵ In 1945, only 2% of the country's labour force were producing for the export market compared to 9.5% prior to the war. See David Coates, The Labour Party and the Struggle for Socialism, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975, p.67.

⁶ In 1945 the UK's sterling liabilities to the colonies totalled £454 million.

⁷ Some £1,500 million in 1947-49.

⁸ India had accumulated huge sterling balances during the war - the Reserve Bank of India was holding around £1,300 million in 1946 - a figure which included India's total overseas earnings. In a 1946 report to the Fabian Society, A.C. Gilpin identified three ways in which Britain could reduce India's outstanding balances; by selling more overseas investments, by funding the Indian Government's liability in respect of pension charges etc., and by selling war-time factories, equipment and stores owned by the British Government in India. See A.C. Gilpin, India's Sterling Balances, a report prepared for the Indian Affairs Group of the Fabian Society, Fabian Publications Ltd. and V. Gollancz Ltd., Research Series No.112, June 1946, p.5, p.11.

⁹ This was agreed at a meeting between the Colonial Office, the Treasury, and the Bank of England in February 1946. See A.E. Hinds, 'Imperial Policy and Colonial Sterling Balances 1943-56', in Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1991, p.29.

One of Britain's biggest problems was her substantial trade deficit with the dollar areas. Following the abrupt termination by America of the Lease-Lend agreement at the end of the war, the Government was faced with a pressing need to increase exports to these areas in order to earn the vital gold and dollars necessary to pay for her balance of trade deficit, circumstances which made the dollar-earning colonies particularly important to the British economy. Under the sterling area system, Britain enjoyed low interest loans as well as support for the pound against the dollar, whilst the colonies, forced to spend their dollars within the sterling area despite the fact that Britain could not supply the goods they required, suffered shortages and deprivation.¹⁰

The debate which surrounded the issue of overseas military expenditure was conducted principally between Attlee and the Chancellor, Hugh Dalton, both of whom were prepared to consider reductions, and the Chiefs of Staff, who were supported by Bevin in their determination to resist any cuts. Many other influential voices were arguing by the mid-1940s that Britain's overseas commitments needed to be reduced. In addition to John Maynard Keynes¹¹ and Sir Roger Makins, Deputy Under-Secretary of State at the Foreign Office,¹² those expressing unease on the issue included the Bank of England, the Balance of Payments Working Party and the (unpublished) *Economic Survey* for 1946. In spite of such disquiet, coupled with Soviet and American hostility¹³ to the continuing existence of Britain's Colonial Empire, British policy showed no intention of scaling-down the

¹ Britain would not allow the colonies to buy from the dollar area because the consequential drain on her gold and dollar reserves would have further weakened the economy and threatened the status of the £.

¹¹ See J. Tomlinson, 'the Attlee Government and the Balance of Payments, 1945-1951', in R. McKibbin and J. Rowlett (eds.), *20th Century British History*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 1991, p.50.

¹² Makins admitted in 1951 that 'Foreign policy is based on national strength, and cannot safely get too much out of line with the resources, moral and material, which a country can control.' See FO 371/124968, no. 24/2, 11th August 1951, 'Some notes on British foreign policy': memorandum by Sir R. Makins (FO), in R Hyams, *The Labour Government and the End of Empire 1945-1951: part 1 High Policy and Administration*, HMSO, London, 1992, pp.373-378.

¹³ Roosevelt interpreted the pledge of self-determination contained in the Atlantic Charter as applying to all nations, including the colonies, but the central motivation of US opposition to the British Empire was the desire to establish a global free-market economy in order to expand her own trade. The 1944 Bretton Woods Agreement had already created the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, both effectively under US control, as well as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, a free trade agreement. The US Loan and subsequent Marshall Aid programme were not without strings and were accompanied by an expectation of contributions to 'defending the West' against communism.

world role which it could no longer technically afford.¹⁴ On the Left the suspicion was soon aroused that the circle could be squared only by persuading the USA to underwrite the Empire-Commonwealth as a bulwark against Communism.

Constructing the Enemy

As early as January 1945, Harry Pollitt had expressed misgivings over the support given by Attlee, Bevin and Dalton to the decision of the wartime Coalition Government to intervene against the Communist-led partisans in Greece.¹⁵ His warning that London and Washington would react against any elected Communist governments in Western Europe as 'too radical' or 'too Red',¹⁶ was soon substantiated. British officials saw the establishment of a 'special relationship'¹⁷ with the USA as a means of curtailing Soviet power and preventing Communism from gaining a foothold in Western Europe and the colonies, although they were at pains to stress that this co-operation between Britain and

¹⁴ Over £200 million of the £600 million balance of payments deficit in 1947 was accounted for by military spending - the Attlee Governments had increased armament spending to six times that of the pre-war Conservative Government in order to maintain the imperial commitments it claimed to eschew.

¹⁵ Greece was of particular strategic importance to Britain because of its position in the Eastern Mediterranean. An essential part of Britain's European policy was to maintain 'close and friendly relations with Italy, Greece and Turkey, so as to secure our strategic position in the Eastern Mediterranean' - necessary to keep open channels between Britain and her interests in India, Malaya, Australia, New Zealand and her oil supplies in Persia and Iraq. A victory for ELAS would have bolstered Soviet power and threatened British interests in the region. FO 371 50912, no.5471, August 1945, 'Stocktaking after VE Day': memorandum by Sir O. Sargent (11th. July, revised), in R. Hyam, op.cit., pp.297-303.

¹⁶ Harry Pollitt, 'Lessons of the Labour Conference', in *Labour Monthly*, January 1945, p.24.

¹⁷ Britain saw her role within the 'special relationship' as one of elder counsellor rather than junior partner. (See FO 371 50912, 'Stocktaking after VE Day', op.cit.) Superior diplomacy was supposed to compensate for the manifold disabilities that might be thought to stand in the way of achieving this relationship. (FO 371 50912, 'Stocktaking after VE Day', op.cit.; FO 371 44557, no.2560, 9th. August 1945, (Anglo-American relations and the position of Britain): despatch from Lord Halifax (Washington) to Mr. Bevin (FO), in R. Hyam, op.cit., pp.304-306.) But Bevin accurately reflected British condescension towards the Americans when he told Nehru, years later, that the US administration was 'apt to take unreflecting plunges.' 'We made it our business', he confided, 'to restrain them'. (Quoted in Peter G. Boyle, 'Britain, America and the transition from economic to military assistance, 1948-1951, in *The Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 22, No. 3, July 1987, p.533.) This was the view expressed in Cabinet too, as for example in discussions of US policy in Asia. (CAB 129 41, CP (50) 200, 30th. August 1950, 'Review of the international situation in Asia in the light of the Korean conflict': Cabinet memorandum by Mr. Bevin, in R. Hyam, op.cit., pp.369-370.) In 1951, the Foreign Office expressed concern over US policies, her political and administrative system, lack of diplomacy, even the 'emotional disposition' of her people. See FO 371 124968, 'Some notes on British foreign policy', op.cit., pp.373-378.

America would not detract from the goal of attaining the maximum strength and independence of the UK.¹⁸

Although the Foreign Office admitted that it would be extremely difficult to analyse the policy decisions of the secretive Soviet regime,¹⁹ this did not prevent the British Government from either speculating or drawing conclusions. Labour's Foreign Secretary Ernest Bevin²⁰ and the FO were at one in identifying certain Soviet policies in Europe²¹ and Soviet intentions in the Mediterranean and the Middle East as causes on which to risk confrontation. A grandiose canvas of responsibilities was accordingly set out in the summer of 1945 - when Britain was technically bankrupt - by the Foreign Secretary's advisers. Chief Adviser Orme Sargent, for example, counselled that 'we must maintain our interests in Finland, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Austria, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria, even though we may have to acquiesce in Russian domination in Roumania and Hungary . . . In the immediate future we must take the offensive in challenging communist penetration in as many of the Eastern countries of Europe as possible.'²² The considered view in London

¹⁸ See FO 371 124968, 'Some notes on British foreign policy', op.cit. Ernest Bevin was particularly anxious that Britain's foreign policy should as far as possible remain independent of American constraints and also be 'in keeping with British fundamental traditions', that is not of the left. (CAB 129/23, CP (48)7, 5th. January 1948, 'Review of Soviet policy': Cabinet memorandum by Mr. Bevin (Extract), in R. Hyam, op.cit., pp.319-326.) In the immediate post-war years, Bevin proposed a 'western union', based on the joint exploitation of colonial resources by the Western European powers, with the aim of building Europe into a strong alternative to US and Soviet power. See A.J. Stockwell, 'A Widespread and Long-Concocted Plot to Overthrow Government in Malaya? the origins of the Malayan Emergency', in The Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, Vol. 21, No. 3, September 1993, p.82.

¹⁹ FO 371 50912, 'Stocktaking after VE Day', op.cit, pp.297-303.

²⁰ For details of Bevin's career, see; Peter Weiler, Ernest Bevin, Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1993.

²¹ Ministers were particularly sensitive to the spread of Communist ideas in France and Italy and the Soviet Union's extensive use of propaganda. It was suggested that the Labour Party, rather than the Government, might be a more effective vehicle for conducting anti-Communist propaganda among the Social Democratic parties in Western Europe.

²² FO 371 50912, 'Stocktaking after VE Day', op.cit. The CP was more influential in Continental Europe than in Britain and there were real fears that it could flourish in the chaotic aftermath of the war, though the economically backward Eastern European countries were seen to be more susceptible than their neighbours. (CAB 128 12 CM19 (48), 5th March 1948, 'Foreign Policy in Europe': Cabinet conclusions on the Soviet threat, in Hyam, op.cit., pp.331-332.) The defeated German population, suffering economic chaos and deprivation, was also considered to be vulnerable to Communist ideology. Faced with this possibility, the British initially argued against the installation of a liberal regime in Germany, believing that a temporary dictatorship might be necessary to oversee that country's reconstruction, (See CAB 129 23, 'Review of Soviet Policy', op.cit.) and were prepared to renege on agreements with the Soviet Union by supporting the creation of a divided Germany. See Peter Weiler, 1993, op.cit., p.157-160.

was that 'If we cease to regard ourselves as a World power we shall gradually cease to be one.'²³

Towards the end of 1945, Dutt speculated on the emergence of a Western European bloc from which the Soviet Union would be excluded at the expense of 'the real unity of democratic anti-fascist Europe',²⁴ and subsequently identified imperialism as the common factor which united Britain and America in a 'common front against the advancing tide (of colonial nationalism) which threatens to engulf all imperialist interests.'²⁵ The situation in the colonies, where peoples' expectations had been raised by their wartime experiences²⁶ and the principles of democracy and self-determination enshrined in the Atlantic Charter,²⁷ was considered by some British officials to be almost as serious as the danger in Europe. Here Britain faced a double challenge through the spread of Communist ideas and the rise of national liberation movements - many of which were Communist-led - both of which posed a threat to British and growing American economic interests in the colonies.

Although, as Curtis points out, 'The secret planning documents are often explicit about the absence of any real threat from the Soviet Union to Western interests in the Third World',²⁸ Communism and nationalism were routinely conflated.²⁹ In this manner,

²³ FO 371 50912, 'Stocktaking after VE Day', op.cit., pp.297-303. These pretensions to power provided the impetus behind Britain's acquisition of the former German colony of Cyrenaica in Libya as part of the post-war settlement, a 'defensive' action which in the long-term served to intensify Soviet insecurity and fuel Libyan nationalism. Yet Soviet encroachment on surrounding territories such as Bulgaria was condemned as expansionist.

²⁴ R.P. Dutt, 'Notes of the Month', in Labour Monthly, September 1945, p.264. Two months later, he wrote that the 'aim of a strengthened Germany under British patronage, and a Western European bloc led by Britain, and excluding the Soviet Union, is the consistent red thread running through all the turns and manoeuvres of British foreign policy in the years between the wars'. Rajani Palme Dutt, 'Notes of the Month', in Labour Monthly, November 1945, p.326.

²⁵ R.P. Dutt, 'Britain and Empire', in Labour Monthly, February 1947, p.37.

²⁶ The war had offered the colonial peoples new opportunities - in Africa, the need to recruit for the war effort sparked an information revolution which raised literacy levels and disseminated new ideas. In addition, Britain's wartime reverses such as the fall of Singapore, had exposed the vulnerability of the imperial power and given colonial nationalists new hope.

²⁷ Colonial troops returned home from a conflict fought in the name of democracy and self-determination expecting that these same principles would be applied to their own peoples. As a result, colonial trade unionism and nationalist movements blossomed throughout the Empire from the mid-1940s.

²⁸ Mark Curtis, The Ambiguities of Power: British Foreign since 1945, Zed Books, London, 1995. p.29.

attacks against nationalists were justified by claims that the action was aimed at containing what Bevin called 'the internal canker of Communist-inspired subversion and treachery'.³⁰ These were attitudes already discernable in the Attlee Government's decision to assist the French and Dutch Governments to repossess their former colonies of Vietnam and Indonesia at the end of the war.³¹

'After one year of Labour Government,' the CPGB claimed in May 1946, 'the subject people are asking with growing impatience in what way Labour's colonial administration and policy differs from the Tories'.³² By 1947, the political climate had deteriorated to the extent that Dutt was arguing that the central objective of the Labour Government's foreign policy was 'to maintain the Empire, to maintain the world strategic and economic interests of British imperialism'.³³ This objective, he claimed, guided every phase of Britain's foreign policy - from the tolerance of Franco's Spain, to the intolerance of the Left in Greece and the continued occupation of Cyprus.

²⁹ While Bevin admitted that colonial independence movements were 'often nationalistic rather than Communist', (CAB 129/23, Review of Soviet Policy, op.cit.), he explained the dangers thus; 'In the general state of ferment in Asia, Soviet policy seeks to exploit local nationalist sentiment through local Communist parties which, in many cases, contain Moscow-trained elements' (Ibid). It was a technique which he claimed was adopted by CPs in Burma, Malaya, Borneo, Indonesia and French Indo-China. Bevin's view was backed by Trafford Smith, an assistant-secretary at the Colonial Office during 1945-1950. See CO 537/2758, -11th October 1948, (Communism in the Colonial Empire): minutes by Trafford Smith and Mr. Rees-Williams, in R. Hyam, op.cit., p.333.

³ Quoted in Richard Rathbone, 'Police Intelligence in Ghana in the Late 1940s and 1950s', in the Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History, Vol. 21, No. 3, September 1993, p.118.

³¹ In August 1945, Britain intervened to restore Dutch colonial power in Indonesia following the establishment of a provisional government under President Soekarno. Despite the fact that the Indonesian national liberation forces played a leading role in defeating the Japanese during the war, Britain used these same Japanese soldiers to resist the nationalists until the Dutch were able to reclaim authority. A similar situation arose in Vietnam, where a popular uprising led by Ho Chi Minh had established the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. Although both British and US officials admitted to Ho's popularity and competence, Indian troops, again with the help of defeated Japanese soldiers, kept the colony in check for France. See Curtis, op.cit., p.31.

³² The Party claimed that a mixture of violent repression, as in South East Asia, and insignificant formal concessions were being used against the national movements. See 'The Colonial Resolution', in World News and Views, Vol. 26, No. 21, 25-5-46, p.395; 19th National Congress: resolutions and proceedings, CPGB, 1947, p.15.

³³ R. P. Dutt, Report to the Conference of the Communist Parties of the British Empire, 26th February-2nd March 1947, in We Speak for Freedom, CPGB, pp.13-14. In the Middle East for example, where Britain was the pre-eminent power in the immediate post-war years, with commitments linked to the large oil monopolies operating in the region. Bevin admitted that 'If these interests were lost to us, the effect on the life of this country would be a considerable reduction in the standard of living . . . to the wage packets of the workpeople of this country.' Quoted in R.P. Dutt, The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1953, pp.336-7.

Discontent with Bevin's foreign policy was not confined to the Communists during the Government's salad days. Rumblings within the Labour Party itself coalesced into organised opposition inside the Parliamentary Labour Party in January 1947, when twelve Labour M.P.s formed the Keep Left group. The group's publication, *Keep Left*, warned of a betrayal of Socialist principles³⁴ in March of that year and claimed that Britain was being driven into 'a dangerous dependence on the USA'.³⁵ The task of British Socialism was, wherever possible, 'to save the smaller nations from this futile ideological warfare and to heal the breach between the USA and the USSR'.³⁶

It was a stance with which the CPGB could empathise - Dutt pressed the point that the Labour administration had willingly agreed to increase military spending as a contribution to the 'special relationship' at a time of domestic austerity. 'The price of Bevin abroad is Cripps at home', he wrote. 'Both mean the surrender of the hopes of the Labour movement to the plans of the monopolists. Both mean the surrender of Britain's future to the crazy compass of Wall Street and the mad dog war aims of Washington.'³⁷ The arguments of the Keep Left group also carried some weight within the labour movement for a time.³⁸ However, the continued promotion of Britain as a world power, regardless of her diminished circumstances,³⁹ thwarted the Left critics in general and advocates of a constructive involvement in the process of European unity in particular (which some advocates of a 'third road' desired).

³⁴ R. Crossman, M. Foot, I. Mikardo, *Keep Left*, New Statesman, 1947, p.35.

³⁵ Ibid., p.37.

³⁶ Ibid., p.35.

³⁷ R.P. Dutt, 'Notes of the Month', in *Labour Monthly*, December 1947, p.2. British officials confirmed that 'The foreign policy we are pursuing to-day calls for austerity, restraint, and a sustained productive effort from the British people . . . The key to success abroad lies in the mines, blast furnaces and factories at home'. FO 371 124968, 'Some notes on British foreign policy', op.cit., pp.373-378.

³⁸ Jonathan Schneer claims that 'between the springs of 1946 and 1947 Labour left critics were provided with what seems in retrospect, to have been their most favourable climate during the post-war period.' See Jonathan Schneer, *Labour's Conscience - the labour left 1945-1951*, Alan Unwin Inc., London, 1988, p.5.

³⁹ 'We want Europe to be strong', stated a Foreign Office memorandum, 'but if we were classed as just a European Power and bound in an organic relationship to a predominantly Latin and Catholic grouping, we should soon lose our world position and a great deal of our liberty of action without strengthening either Europe or ourselves'. FO 371 124968, 'Some notes on British foreign policy', op.cit., pp.373-378.

Cold War Sets In

The more temperate stance adopted by elements of the Labour left was in part a consequence of the fact that the insider's view of the Soviet Union's territorial ambitions was nothing like as frightening as the image projected for public consumption. Orme Sargent at his most pugnacious admitted in 1945 that, 'At the present moment the Soviet Union has been so weakened by the war that Stalin is hardly in a position to force through ruthlessly his policy of ideological penetration against definite opposition . . . and it is doubtful whether she aims at further territorial expansion.'⁴⁰ Attlee was also prepared initially to question whether the Soviets were as great a threat as the hard-liners believed.⁴¹ In truth, there was little evidence of aggressive Soviet expansionism in Western Europe after the war and its grip on Eastern Europe was far from vice-like before the inauguration of the Marshall Plan⁴² in the summer of 1947.

Officially the Russians were denounced for rejecting Marshall Aid⁴³ and turning Eastern Europe into a fortified encampment. But some Socialists realised that the USSR's involvement in the Plan had been contemplated only to make sure that it never happened.⁴⁴ Dutt wrote in December 1947 of an 'Anglo-American offensive . . . directed to partition Europe'⁴⁵ and to create a 'cordon sanitaire' of Western European nations under

⁴⁰ FO 371 50912, 'Stocktaking after VE Day', op.cit. It was unlikely, the Cabinet was told, that the Soviet Union was planning war with the West because 'Technically they are still backward compared with the Americans and ourselves'. See CAB 129/23, 'Review of Soviet policy', op.cit..

⁴¹ Peter Weiler, 1993, op.cit., p.161. By early 1947 Attlee, who had twice challenged the view that Britain needed to maintain a presence in the Middle East and had argued that the strategic worth of the Mediterranean was exaggerated, (See J.G. Albert, *Attlee, the Chiefs of Staff and the Restructuring of 'Commonwealth Defence' between V.J. Day and the Korean War*, DPhil, Oxford, 1986, p.4, pp.35-39; J. Tomlinson, op.cit., p.54.) abandoned his attempts to soften the hard-line taken by the Foreign Office and the Chiefs of Staff. His suggestion that the maintenance of oil supplies could be assured through negotiation with the Soviet Union was firmly rejected by the Chiefs of Staff. Faced with their resignation threats over the issue and Bevin's scornful denunciation of withdrawal as 'Munich over again', Attlee deferred to the opinions of the hard-liners. See J. Tomlinson, op.cit., pp.55-7; Peter Weiler, 1993, op.cit., p.161-162.

⁴² The Plan, named after the American General Marshall who proposed it in a 1947 speech at Harvard, was put into effect in 1948.

⁴³ CAB 129/23, 'Review of Soviet policy', op.cit., pp.319-326.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Schneer, op.cit., p.38.

⁴⁵ R.P. Dutt, 'Notes of the Month', in *Labour Monthly*, December 1947, p.2.

satellite governments. The real problem was the popularity of the European Communist Parties. George Kennan, US Charge d'Affaires at the Moscow Embassy, revealed that the point of Marshall Aid was not 'to prevent the Russians conquering Western Europe, but to prevent Western Europe from deciding that Communism was better able to bring prosperity than was private enterprise.'⁴⁶ By offering the economic revival of the West as a lure to Eastern Europe, the Marshall Plan formed the decisive factor in a polarisation process begun the previous March with President Truman's Doctrine of Containment.

As the Soviet Union's estrangement from her erstwhile allies progressed, the CPGB increasingly found itself an object of criticism in the Communist movement, both for its sympathetic approach to the British Labour Government and for its line on the independence of India in particular. In response, the Party intensified its attacks on the Attlee Government's record and its collaboration with the US,⁴⁷ causing some anxiety in Whitehall. An admission in a 1950 Foreign Office memorandum that, 'they (the US) are paying the piper, and in the last analysis we are dependent on general American support for our security', was subsequently deleted after Herbert Morrison described it as 'a gift to the *Daily Worker*'.⁴⁸

However, the Communist position was not balanced by criticism of Soviet policies during this period. Dutt denied that the alternative to dependence on American imperialism was to be tied to the Soviet Union, maintaining that the choice was one between 'American domination and economic subordination, with worsening conditions', or 'national independence and economic recovery on the basis of the co-operation of Western and Eastern Europe'.⁴⁹ But events such as the Berlin blockade,⁵⁰ the Czech coup of 1948 and

⁴⁶ Michael Balfour, *The Adversaries*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1981, p.82.

⁴⁷ British Communists, assuming the mantle of patriotism, also criticised what was perceived by many to be Americanisation of British culture - referred to by George Orwell as 'the bland allure of post-war affluence, which was eroding authentic working-class culture.' Quoted in Dick Hebdige, 'Towards a Cartography of Taste 1935-1962', in Bernard Waites, Tony Bennett and Graham Martin (eds.), *Popular Culture Past and Present*, The Open University, 1982, p.203.

⁴⁸ FO 371 124968, 'Some notes on British foreign policy', op.cit.

⁴⁹ R.P. Dutt, 'Notes of the Month', in *Labour Monthly*, December 1947, p.3.

the coercion in Poland appeared to contradict this analysis. It was a position which left Communists open to accusations of being Stalin's 'puppets' and ultimately contributed to their estrangement from the Labour Left.

The CP's position was further damaged by the Labour Government's manipulation of Cold War propaganda to attack its critics. This was used to justify a purge of the Civil Service,⁵¹ the proscription of various organisations with Communist links and the expulsion of Labour MPs Konni Zilliacus and Leslie Solley, who had expressed sympathy with the Communist view.⁵² In the face of the economic crisis which gripped Britain in the winter of 1947,⁵³ the financial benefits of the Marshall Plan and the opportunity which this offered for Labour's domestic programme was tempting indeed for Labour dissidents. When coupled with the negative interpretation which was placed on the SU's reaction, it was enough to break the back of Labour dissent - and the 'Third Force' movement fragmented.⁵⁴ In January 1949, the British TUC left the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU) - an organisation formed in the fraternal atmosphere of 1945 - denouncing it as a Communist front organisation, and joined the pro-Western International Confederation of Trade Unions.⁵⁵ The polarisation of East and West was completed that same year with the signing of the NATO Agreement.⁵⁶

Colonial Conflict

⁵ The Soviet blockade of Berlin in summer 1948 was a response to moves by the Western powers to create a Western-oriented German state.

⁵¹ This resulted in a substantial number of dismissals, resignations and transfers. Peter Weiler, British Labour and the Cold War, Stanford University Press, California, 1988, p.228.

⁵² Bevin launched a savage attack on the left at the 1947 Labour Conference, winning overwhelming support from delegates.

⁵³ Factories were operating at a reduced rate because of a fuel shortage, unemployment rose sharply and imports increased.

⁵⁴ When the Korean War began in June 1950, the Labour left praised the US Government for taking 'the correct and inevitable course'. R. Clough, Labour: a Party fit for Imperialism, Counterattack No. 2, Larkin Publications, London, 1992, p.103.

⁵⁵ This was essentially a political organisation built with British and US government aid.

⁵⁶ By this time, Bevin had dropped the idea of a Third Force in favour of full participation in the Anglo-American alliance.

From 1947, there was growing concern among British officials at the extent and impact of Soviet propaganda in the colonies. Bevin, who had no doubt that 'eventual control of the whole World Island is what the Politburo is aiming at',⁵⁷ complained that; 'The Soviet Government have made much use of the United Nations, the World Federation of Trade Unions and other bodies for colonial propaganda against us; their press and radio constantly pursue the colonial theme'.⁵⁸ In order to counter this, the Attlee Government launched the Information Research Department (IRD)⁵⁹ at the end of 1947. Originally, it was intended that the IRD should promote the Welfare State as a model for the colonies to follow, but the organisation rapidly concentrated its efforts on more negative anti-communist propaganda and activities,⁶⁰ becoming involved in counter-insurgency operations, particularly in Malaya. The main focus of the Department's work in Britain was the distribution of propaganda material to newspapers and radio⁶¹ in an effort to counter the effect of Communist literature, especially the *Daily Worker*, which was consistently critical of the government's anti-insurgency operations.

Throughout its handling of the Communist-led, nationalist rebellion in Malaya, where a 'state of emergency' was declared in June 1948,⁶² the Labour Government was thrown onto the defensive by a CPGB campaign, which claimed that Britain's involvement in such regional conflicts was a direct consequence of her continued pursuance of a world

⁵⁷ CAB 129/25, CP(48)72, 3rd. March 1948, 'The threat to Western civilisation': Cabinet memorandum by Mr. Bevin, in R. Hyam, op.cit., 329.

⁵⁸ CAB 129/23, 'Review of Soviet Policy', pp.319-326, op.cit.

⁵⁹ The IRD, formally the Communist Information Department, was established following suggestions by Christopher Mayhew - a junior Foreign Office Minister in Attlee's Government - that a separate propaganda department was needed. Bevin played a leading role in its creation. Scott Lucas, 'The British Ministry of Propaganda' in the *Independent on Sunday*, 26-2-95.

⁶⁰ In Britain, the section of public opinion most likely to be influenced by alternative views of colonial unrest was the trade unions. Denis Healey, then a young Labour Party official, worked to develop IRD contacts within the unions, who received unattributable briefing material from the IRD through the Labour Party. See Susan L Carruthers, *Winning Hearts and Minds - British governments, the media and colonial counter-insurgency 1944-1960*, Leicester University Press, Leicester, 1995, pp.12-13; 263. During the 1950s, the Department worked to discredit nationalist leaders in Britain's African colonies.

⁶¹ The BBC agreed to Foreign Office requests to 'temper its broadcasts to accord with the national interest'. See the *Independent on Sunday*, op.cit. The BBC's services to Eastern Europe were designed to 'pillory the Communist regime and display it as being ridiculous as well as cynical and evil.'

⁶² In common with other enemy-occupied territories, Malaya had been re-claimed by the British at the end of the war.

role. The CPGB's position - that Britain, faced with a threat to her control of the colony's resources, succumbed to calls from the big rubber and tin interests for 'ruthless action' against workers and nationalists⁶³ - is supported in more recent studies which also identify an economic impetus behind the Labour Government's role in Malaya.⁶⁴

There is no doubt that the stakes were significant, as Malaya constituted the largest net dollar earner in the whole of the sterling area. During the period 1946-51, the colony's exports comprised £460 million of the total £515 million British exports to the USA;⁶⁵ this allowed Britain to enjoy a virtual monopoly on resources which were central to the American economy. Such facts were used by Dutt to back his argument that the United States, in line with its own imperial ambitions, had amended its antagonistic position on the European Empires by 1947 to the extent that the old Imperialist powers retained their colonial territories - but while they bore the cost of the wars of colonial independence, American industries reaped the profits.⁶⁶

British communists rejected Foreign Office attempts to explain the Malayan conflict in terms of Cold War politics,⁶⁷ a position for which there was little direct evidence,⁶⁸ and

⁶³ E.C. Statement on Malaya, March 23rd., 1950, Presented to the 22nd. National Congress of the CPGB, (CPGBA).

⁶⁴ A.J. Rotter, 'The Triangular Route to Vietnam', in *International History Review*, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1984; R. Clough, op.cit.; M.Curtis, op.cit.; S. Carruthers, op.cit. Rotter further claims that the Attlee Government was determined to revive the 'triangular trade' facility between Britain, the dollar-earning colonies and the U.S. which was disrupted by the Japanese invasion during the war, allocating £86 million in grants and loans for the purpose between 1945 and 1949. A.J. Rotter, op.cit. Bevin himself conceded that British foreign policy in the Far East after the war was dictated by her commercial interests in the area. M. Curtis, op.cit., p.12.

⁶⁵ In total, the colony supplied 45% of the world's natural rubber and 30% of the world's output of tin. R. Clough, op.cit., p.88; M. Curtis, op.cit., p.13.

⁶⁶ R.P. Dutt, 'The Betrayal of Britain'. in *Labour Monthly*, January 1949, p.6.

⁶⁷ Britain worked to persuade the US to provide economic and military aid to South East Asia on the basis that communism was attempting to seize control in the area, especially after the victory of Communist forces in China in 1949. The F.O. claimed that the Conference of Asian and Australian C.P.s, held in February 1948, had provided the catalyst for the Malayan Communist Party's action and that MCP delegates had received tuition from Chinese Communists whilst attending the WFTU's Peking Conference in November 1949. Former Secretary of State Malcolm MacDonald, then Commissioner-General for South-East Asia, was convinced that the unrest was inspired by Moscow, although he could offer no proof of this - it was in response to his advice that the MCP was banned some weeks after the emergency was declared. See S. Carruthers, op.cit., pp.75-6.

⁶⁸ Shortly after the declaration of the emergency, Sir Alexander Newbould, Chief Secretary of the Malayan Federation, acknowledged to the American Consul the lack of 'conclusive proof that the violence

consistently reported the situation as an attack by an imperialist government upon the nationalist and trade union movement of Malaya. In support of this they were able to cite the example of the Pan-Malayan Federation of Trade Unions (PMFTU), which was banned following its involvement in violent protests. The organisation's leaders were arrested and, during May 1949, its former president and vice-president⁶⁹ were both hanged by the Malayan authorities.⁷⁰

The Malayan Communist Party (MCP),⁷¹ formed in 1930 mainly from amongst the large Chinese minority,⁷² was portrayed by the British C.P. as an organisation which had led the struggle against Japanese forces during the war⁷³ and was now defending the living standards and trade union rights of the Malayan people in the face of intensified exploitation by monopolist industries.⁷⁴ 'The profits of the tin and rubber companies are swollen with the blood of British soldiers and of the men, women and children of Malaya', an E.C. statement declared, 'The American imperialists are piling up stocks torn

and murder was due to Communist activities'. (Quoted in A.J. Stockwell, op.cit., p.74.) Some months later, the US Consul had still not seen documentary proof that communists had instigated the unrest and the Colonial Office admitted that the rebels lacked 'any substantial organised assistance in arms' as would have been expected if Moscow or Peking had been involved. (Ibid., p.78.) In November 1950, James Griffiths, then Secretary of State for the Colonies, wrote in a memo; 'there is virtually no evidence of direct assistance from outside to the MCP.' (Ibid., p.79.)

⁶⁹ S.A. Ganapathy and Veerasenam, respectively.

⁷⁰ Report of the Executive Committee, 22nd. CPGB Conference, November 1949-December 1951, (CPGBA)

⁷¹ The MCP, which in the early post-war years had concentrated its efforts on building a base in the Malayan labour and trade union movement, adopted the more militant line prevailing among colonial CPs by 1948. Colonial Intelligence put the number of rebels at between three and five thousand in the first year of the conflict, though there were no figures available on the level of support for the Communists among the Chinese community as a whole. CO 537/2677, Colonial Political Intelligence: Summary No. 1, 1948, pp.1-2, (PRO).

⁷² Part of the British propaganda approach was to portray the nationalist movement as unrepresentative of the Malayan population as a whole by emphasising the predominant Chinese membership of the MCP.

⁷³ The CPGB claimed that the British authorities planned to use defeated Japanese troops in Malaya against the same Malayan Liberation Armies which were 'feted for their (war) efforts in the London Victory Parade'. Report of the EC, to the 22nd CPGB Conference, November 1949-December 1951, (CPGBA).

⁷⁴ Communists maintained that as the profits of the monopolies grew in the post-war years, the real wages of labour fell. Local rubber producers, already suffering from the effects of the war, were forced to sell their goods to the British Rubber Purchasing Unit at 80% less than the pre-war price. See Wu Tian Wang, 'Malaya', in *We Speak for Freedom*, op.cit., p.62.

from the sufferings of a whole people, in preparation for a third world war, while more and more lives are lost in the attempt to make Singapore 'safe' as an anti-Soviet base.'⁷⁵

During its campaign to end the war in Malaya, the CPGB printed a number of pamphlets and leaflets, organised meetings and passed resolutions on the issue, some of which were adopted at national trade union conferences - notably the Electrical Trades Union, the Firebrigades Union and the Scottish and Welsh Miners. Malayan Plays were performed at the Unity Theatre and Lim Hong Bee's *Malayan Monitor*⁷⁶ was published monthly from 1947.⁷⁷ The *Daily Worker* in particular persistently condemned the Government's handling of the situation in Malaya. Reports claimed that particularly brutal methods of repression were being used against the civilian population including the razing of villages, collective fines and punishments and the use of headhunters to deter others from joining the nationalist forces. By 1950, official figures put the number of people interned in concentration camps at 500,000 and the authorities had put a price on the heads of the rebels.⁷⁸

The CPGB's presentation of an alternative view of the conflict had some impact on the left in Britain. In October 1948, J.D. Higham, Assistant-Secretary at the Colonial Office, reported 'a mass of correspondence now being received, mainly from trade union branches and shop stewards' committees on the situation in Malaya',⁷⁹ condemning Government policy in the colony. It was enough to prod the Colonial Office into a counter-campaign; special press briefings were provided, M.P.s were supplied with model answers to some

⁷⁵ Executive Committee Statement on Malaya, March 23rd. 1950, Presented to the 22nd. National Congress of the CPGB, (CPGBA).

⁷⁶ Cambridge-educated Lim, who formed the Malayan Democratic Union in 1946 and served as the London representative of the MCP from 1948, appears to have acted as a link between the CPGB and the Malayan Communist Party. (See S. Howe, op.cit., p.216). Lim was a member of the CPGB's Malayan Committee. See Noreen Branson, *The History of the Communist Party of Great Britain 1941-51*, Lawrence and Wishart Ltd., London, 1997, p.150.

⁷⁷ Report of the International Department to the Political Committee for discussion on 25-6-53, CP CENT PC 02 15, (CPGBA).

⁷⁸ In some instances, the bodies of rebels were publicly displayed.

⁷⁹ Quoted in S. Carruthers, op.cit., p.97.

of the more percipient questions on the Malayan situation and pro-Government propaganda material was issued to Labour Party and trade union branches.⁸⁰

Indian Independence

Although the Communists were willing to give Labour the benefit of the doubt with regard to the Indian question in the spring 1945, this was not indicative of a lack of vigilance on the issue. Michael Carritt pointed out in November of that year that the British labour movement was 'unambiguously committed by its own resolutions' to a democratic solution of the Indian problem.⁸¹ Following its post-war election victory Labour had the opportunity to negotiate a settlement which would establish a genuinely democratic Constituent Assembly,⁸² able to frame a constitution which would meet the Indian people's aspirations of freedom and sovereignty.⁸³ The hope among British communists was that the Attlee Government, armed with its huge Commons majority, would set the process of Indian independence on the democratic path, but in the event it chose to continue the policies of Amery and the National Government, its proposals simply mirroring those put forward by Cripps in 1942.

It was during February 1946 - in the wake of the Indian naval mutiny - that Stafford Cripps was again despatched to India, this time by Attlee, charged with the task of constructing a solution acceptable to all parties. The ensuing constitutional Plan, produced on 16th May, was rejected by both Congress and the Communists as

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Michael Carritt, 'A Constituent Assembly for India', in *Labour Monthly*, Vol. XXVII, No. 11, November 1945, p.343. The CPGB's Colonial Committee had been extended in 1943 and again in 1944, when a colonial department was established with Carritt at its head.

⁸² The Assembly should, according to Carritt, be democratically elected by adult suffrage and have real power, not merely function as a constitution-making body whose recommendations the British Government could reject or modify at will. There was particular concern among communists that economic decisions such as the writing-off or scaling down of India's sterling balances could be taken by Britain before independence. See Michael Carritt, November 1945, op.cit., p.343-4; G. Adhikari, 'India', in *We Speak For Freedom*, op.cit., p.52.

⁸³ Carritt warned that, if the existing proposals were allowed to stand as Britain's last word on Indian affairs, 'the future is beset with dangers of the first magnitude. The Indian parties, frustrated, embittered and without the power to tackle their own domestic problems, will be driven along the barren road of communal dissension, whilst, in this country, the Press will continue to wash its hands of a deadlock which it claims to be of Indian concern only.' Ibid, pp.344-5.

unworkable - 'a complex constitutional structure prolific of deadlock and ensuring continued British control in practice',⁸⁴ according to Dutt. Its proposals, which did not include partition but contained a clause conceding the right to re-examine the Union after a ten-year period, were subsequently slammed by Adhikari as likely to inflame Congress-League differences 'into a fratricidal conflict by raising rival hopes'.⁸⁵

Dutt later elaborated on these concerns by referring to a Cabinet document⁸⁶ produced at this time, in which it was stated that the 'Egypt-Transjordanian' model of pseudo-independence was planned for India and that 'important Indian elements' would be offered permanent British assistance against the possibility of unrest, an attempt, Communists believed, to ensure the ascendancy of pro-British sections of the Indian elite. The document further revealed that Britain was prepared to invest extensively in India - generating large profits for Indian firms - if 'India were prepared to be turned into a full-scale British imperial base of operations on the southern borders of the USSR'.⁸⁷ As the grip of the Cold War tightened, such proposals were bound to fuel the belief that Britain was determined to cling on to her economic and military interests in the region.

Following the lifting of passport restrictions in March 1946, Dutt had embarked upon a four-month tour of India in an attempt to dissuade the CPI from its innovatory views on the nationalities question.⁸⁸ He emphasised the Muslim League's communal character, warning that the organisation's aims were based upon religious rather than nationalist considerations and claiming that its rigid demand for the establishment of Pakistan had become a 'reactionary obstructive tactic which plays into the hands of imperialism'.⁸⁹ He

⁸⁴ 'Britain and Empire', *Labour Monthly*, February 1947, p.41. Under the proposals in the Plan, the central economic and social planning which communists and the Congress left advocated would not have been feasible.

⁸⁵ G. Adhikari, *We Speak for Freedom*, op.cit., p.54.

⁸⁶ A report on Cabinet policy presented to the Empire Staff Conference, which was held at the beginning of March 1946.

⁸⁷ Quoted in R.P. Dutt, *We Speak for Freedom*, op.cit., p.14

⁸⁸ During the visit, he tried diplomacy by conceding that the CPI 'first discerned in 1942 the genuine nationalist element concealed within the Pakistan demand', at the same time as he attacked the League's presentation of that demand. See R.P. Dutt, 'India and Pakistan', in *Labour Monthly*, March 1946.

⁸⁹ Ibid., pp.86-87.

made clear to Congress leaders his opposition to the CPI line and stressed his continued support of nationalist unity in India. During his visit, Dutt held intensive discussions with leading political figures including Nehru, Gandhi, Cripps, and Jinnah as well as addressing the CPI itself.⁹⁰

The visit was an undoubted success; by the time Dutt left for Britain in the July he had communicated the CPGB's distrust of the League and redirected the CPI towards the policy of a common Indian union.⁹¹ But the suppression of the INC during the war years had allowed the Muslim League to spread its message, facilitated by a British administration which, the CPGB believed, fostered the organisation as a foil to Congress power. The League was now in a position to use the demand for a separate Pakistan nation to impede progress towards Indian independence.

When the Mountbatten Plan⁹² was formulated the following year, Dutt denounced 'this enforced retreat of imperialism' which he claimed, qualified in practice the formal transfer of power and protected the essential political, economic and strategic interests of British capital in India.⁹³ In the British Parliament, Communist M.P. William Gallagher was the only member to criticise Attlee's initial announcement of the programme. However, the CPGB was beginning to re-examine its position at this point. Although the core difference of this Plan was its acceptance of partition, and it remained Dutt's opinion that partition was an encouragement both to communal strife and interference from foreign imperialist powers, British Communists were aware that its implementation would result in Nehru taking power in India⁹⁴ - a positive development in their opinion. As the violence escalated and chaos and anarchy threatened the sub-continent, the CPGB was forced to make the best of the situation and accept the inevitability of the Pakistan nation.

⁹⁰ J. Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., pp.225-6.

⁹¹ M.B. Rao (ed.), Documents of the History of the Communist Party of India, Vol. 7, 1948-1950, People's Publishing House, New Delhi, 1976, pp.174-5.

⁹² Mountbatten was sworn in as the last Viceroy of India at a ceremony in Delhi on 24th March 1947, and began work on his compromise plan.

⁹³ R.P. Dutt, 'Notes of the Month, in Labour Monthly, July 1947, p.213.

⁹⁴ Ibid., pp.214-5.

New Enemies

Following Britain's withdrawal from India on 15th August, 1947, the CPI passed a resolution pledging full cooperation with the newly-established Indian government in its construction of a nation, and describing Nehru as the person most able to set India 'on the road to Socialism and prosperity'.⁹⁵ This was in line with the CPGB's optimism on the possibility of cultivating Nehru as a potential ally, but contrary to the view emerging in Moscow as the Cold War intensified.

The establishment of the Cominform at the nine-Power Conference presided over by Zhdanov in Warsaw during September 1947, marked a closing of ranks by Communists. As the breach between East and West widened, communist emissaries were despatched to colonial Communist Party conferences to preach the new sectarian line - delegates from the Yugoslavian CP, at that time much favoured by Stalin, were especially in evidence. The Indian Party itself held discussions with fraternal delegates from the Yugoslav League of Communists who attended the Second CPI Congress in 1948⁹⁶ and, in accordance with the new mood of confrontation sweeping through the Communist movement, adopted a more revolutionary stance.

1948 witnessed a sunburst of nationalist agitation throughout the colonies, beginning in January, when Burma left the Commonwealth and opted for independence as a republic.⁹⁷ By August, roughly a third of the Burmese army had defected to the Communists.⁹⁸ The subsequent armed struggle in Malaya, riots in Baghdad and the advance of Communism

⁹⁵ Mohan Ram, *Indian Communism*, Vikas Publications, New Delhi, 1969, p.10; Quoted in P.S. Gupta, 1972, *op.cit.*, p.29.

⁹⁶ M. Ram, 1969, *op.cit.*, p.19. This policy, which was also urged by delegates from China, Mongolia and Australia, dominated the congresses of the International Union of Students and the World Federation of Democratic Youth - which was attended by Vietnamese delegates in military uniform - both held in Calcutta during 1948. See J. Callaghan, 1993, *op.cit.*

⁹⁷ In Burma, Britain had backed the Anti-Fascist Peoples' Freedom League as the least radical movement operating within the colony. Communists attacked the subsequent Attlee-Aung San Agreement as a national humiliation.

⁹⁸ Frank Furedi, 'Creating a Breathing Space: the political management of colonial emergencies', in the *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, Vol. 21, No. 3, September 1993, p.95.

in China were all reminders of the mutability of Britain's position in the East.⁹⁹ To the remote observers in the Soviet Union, the uncertainties and upheaval which accompanied Indian independence seemed to represent perfect conditions in which to nurture revolution.¹⁰⁰ Moscow accordingly attacked the India settlement on the basis that any action by the British Government sprang from unscrupulous intentions, dismissing independence as an artifice¹⁰¹ and instructing Indian Communists to take an anti-Congress line. The Congress government was initially accused of being a junior partner in the exploitation of India and later, as the attacks intensified, of being the main protagonist.

Such arguments were seized upon by those Indian Communists who had resisted the popular front tactics followed since the Dutt-Bradley Thesis and disliked the leadership of P.C. Joshi which was equated with them. In a sharp swing to the left, the Party passed a resolution in December 1947 accusing the Congress leadership of collaboration with imperialism. The Nationalist government's domestic policies were criticised for failing to alleviate the suffering of the masses and its foreign policies for being bound to the British Commonwealth. At the Second CPI Congress, held in Calcutta during 1948, Moscow's will prevailed as Joshi was replaced by B. T. Ranadive - a hardliner recruited during the 'third period' - in a move which heralded a strategy of sabotage, violence and indiscriminate strikes by the Indian CP.¹⁰²

⁹⁹ The Peoples Republic of China was formally established in October 1949, and in the same month Bevin expressed concern that the Chinese Communists' success had already led to 'an important movement of opinion' among the Chinese communities in South-East Asia. (See FO 800 445, ff 78-80, 18th. October 1949, (Communist subversive activities in the colonies): minute by Mr. Bevin to Mr. Attlee, in R. Hyam, *op cit.*, p.340). However, the success of the CPC served as a useful lever to involve the US in the region. Bevin wrote in August 1950; 'Within the last year . . . the US, largely owing to the Communist threat, have been disposed to take a closer interest in developments in South-East Asia to the extent of being prepared to give military and economic aid.' CAB 129 41, 'Review of the international situation in Asia in the light of the Korean conflict', *op.cit.*, pp.369-370.

¹⁰⁰ Guy Wint, 'Communism in India', in David Footman (ed.), *St. Anthony's Papers*, No. IX, International Communism, Chatto and Windus, London, 1960.

¹⁰¹ E.M. Zhukov, in a report to the nine-party conference, claimed the Congress leadership had accepted a 'sham independence'. M.B. Rao, 1976, *op.cit.*, Introduction.

¹⁰² After the transfer of power, the Commonwealth Relations Office produced a fortnightly report on political developments in India and Pakistan, including a section on communist activity. The reports were particularly concerned with the spread of Communist influence in Hyderabad, where fighting had already broken out. See CO 537/2725, Communism in India and Pakistan, 1948, (PRO).

The Ranadive faction was encouraged in its militancy by the success of Communists in Hyderabad's Telengana region,¹⁰³ where Andhra Communists following the Maoist strategy had steered an agrarian movement into a peasant uprising. The situation, which at one point posed a serious threat to the Congress Government, was one which the nationalist administration could not afford to tolerate and in the crackdown which followed the CPI was reduced to a state of disarray - the majority of its activists gaoled, Communist-controlled trade unions disintegrating, the peasant movement faltering and links between the Communist leadership and the masses severed.¹⁰⁴

For the next few years the influence of the CPGB inside the CPI was negligible; Joshi, perceived as Dutt's acolyte, was actually expelled from the organisation and Dutt himself was regarded by the new leadership as a 'revisionist'. Until the international situation changed the CPI was allowed to pursue a destructive sectarianism and advice from Britain was ignored - such as Dutt's warning in a secret memorandum to the CPI in 1949 that Moscow was beginning to re-evaluate the Nehru government in the light of its movement towards a non-aligned foreign policy;¹⁰⁵ the Ranadive group stubbornly refused to change tack. Eventually the CPI leadership became an obstacle in the way of progress towards establishing friendly relations between the Soviet and Indian Governments and as such could not be allowed to continue. The replacement of Ranadive's leadership by the Andhra faction in the summer of 1950 failed to solve the problem however, as the strategy of peasant revolt favoured by the new leaders was still at odds with the Soviet and CPGB position.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, the success of Mao in China had an immediate impact on these Andhra Communists, who soon came to think of themselves as 'Maoists'. With its customary dishonesty, however, Moscow's role in the division of the Indian Communists was simply ignored and blame for the CPI's confused and factionalized condition was

¹⁰³ A feudal stronghold in Hyderabad state ruled by the Nizam.

¹⁰⁴ M.B. Rao, *op.cit.*, Introduction. CPI membership fell from 89,000 in 1948 to just 20,000 in 1950.

¹⁰⁵ P.S Gupta, 1972, *op.cit.*, pp.32-3

¹⁰⁶ The Andhra tactic of raising large peasant armies contrasted with the Russian experience of a small workers' party siezing power in the cities, which was favoured by the Ranadive group. P.S. Gupta, 1972, *op.cit.*, pp.363-4.

placed firmly at the feet of Trotskyist and Titoist elements - the latter recently added to the Cominform's demonology. CPGB leaders such as Palme Dutt were able to intervene with effect in the affairs of the CPI once again from 1951.

That the British Communist Party leadership had little sympathy with the insurrectionist course of the CPI from the outset is evident from the charges of reformism levelled by the Politbureau against both Joshi and Dutt.¹⁰⁷ It is implicit in the fact that British Communists judged Indian independence, as it was actually delivered in August 1947, to be on balance a step forward and in their belief that the CPI should persist with its old policy of nurturing the Congress left and desist from its support of the Muslim League and a multi-national subcontinent. It is also striking that once it became clear that Dutt and the CPGB were out of step with Soviet foreign policy, the Party's experts on India did little to extol the virtues of the new Moscow line. Dutt did protest at the Congress Government's offensive against the CPI, condemning it as an attack upon democracy and the working class as a whole.¹⁰⁸ But he also wrote a warm tribute to Gandhi, following the Congress leader's assassination in January 1948,¹⁰⁹ and Party propaganda as a whole during this period was confined to descriptive reports on events in Telengana, with no mention of the factionalism and acrimony which had beset the CPI.

Dutt only acted to repair the damage done to the CPI when it became clear that the Zhdanov policy had run its course and that Moscow was no longer interested in making trouble in India. From 1950 he struggled to persuade the Party leadership away from insurrectionist policies, endeavouring to explain once more its error in labelling the entire Indian bourgeoisie as the enemy¹¹⁰ based, allegedly, on its misreading of Cominform

¹⁰⁷ M.B. Rao, 1976, op.cit., pp.696-7.

¹⁰⁸ R.P. Dutt, Statement on India, presented to the E.C. of the CPGB, 10-4-48, International Department File, (CPGBA).

¹⁰⁹ R.P. Dutt, 'Notes of the Month', Labour Monthly, March 1948.

¹¹⁰ R.P. Dutt, Programme of the CPI, Report to the E.C. of the CPGB, CCMM (in Volumes), 14-6-51, (CPGBA).

literature.¹¹¹ During talks with visiting Indian Communists in January 1951,¹¹² he stressed that 'we should try to guard against drawing a mechanical parallel with China and try to evolve a correct policy for India on the basis of the concrete situation in India . . . The Indian situation presents some essential differences from China'.¹¹³ He might have quoted Engles' warning that, in pursuing self-determination, 'you must distinguish, not according to abstract ready-made formulas, but according to political realities and the stage of political development'.¹¹⁴

These attempts to steer Indian Communists from the revolutionary path bore fruit in early 1951, when a CPI delegation consisting of C.R. Rao, General Secretary of the Party; M. Basavapunniah; Dange and Ajoy Ghosh travelled to Moscow for a meeting with CPSU officers¹¹⁵ to discuss a revised programme. A new, more moderate policy statement was issued by the CPI's Politbureau in April and in May Rao was replaced as Party leader by Ghosh. British Communists, discussing the CPI's new programme in June 1951, declared it to be 'a strong clear practical programme for developing a popular movement in India'.¹¹⁶ Dutt was satisfied that, while acknowledging general comparisons, the emphasis was now on specific Indian conditions and the economic analysis was one of 'careful moderation'.¹¹⁷

¹¹¹ He referred in particular to the Cominform editorial of 27th January 1950, which precipitated Ranadive's overthrow and which concluded that armed struggle was not appropriate in the present situation. See Ram, op.cit., p.45; P.S. Gupta, op.cit., pp32-6.

¹¹² Ram, op.cit., p.47 .

¹¹³ Quoted in P.S, Gupta, op.cit., p.364.

¹¹⁴ Quoted in We Speak for Freedom, report of the Conference of the Communist Parties of the British Empire, CPGB, 1947, p.28.

¹¹⁵ The CPI delegation met with Mikhail Suslov, V.M. Molotov, G.M. Malenkov and - an indication of the importance of India's position to the Soviet Union - with Stalin himself.

¹¹⁶ E.C. Report to CPGB, 14-6-51, op.cit.

¹¹⁷ The document did contain some criticism of the Congress Government's foreign policy - Nehru was accused of playing between the peace and war camps - which prompted Dutt to argue that India, although not lined up with the peace camp, could no longer be counted as part of the Western imperialist bloc. R.P. Dutt, 'Programme of the CPI', Report of the E.C. to the CPGB, 14-6-51, (CPGBA).

Conclusion

Whilst the CPGB welcomed the election of a Labour Government in 1945 and supported its domestic programme, British Communists soon realised that Labour's adherence to an imperialist foreign policy was undermining its plans to lay the foundations of a Socialist society in Britain. There were concerns that the Attlee Government, burdened with a weakened economy and beguiled by the nation's pretensions to great power status, was endeavouring to win US Government backing for the Empire-Commonwealth and to enlist its help in resisting the rising tide of colonial nationalism by raising the spectre of an aggressive, expansionist Soviet state with designs on Europe and the colonies.

When US economic assistance to Europe was introduced in the form of the Marshall Plan, it was dismissed by the Communists as a means of the new imperialist power gaining political and economic control over Europe. The European Recovery Plan could not solve the world dollar-shortage, the Party warned, and what benefits it did bring would be swallowed up by the demands of the Cold War.¹¹⁸ As the gulf between the Western and Eastern European powers widened, British Communists stepped up their attacks on the Government's foreign and colonial policies and the effects which its overseas spending commitments were having upon the domestic economy. This latter point had particular resonance following the outbreak of the Korean War in June 1950, when defence spending rose by 50%. The consequent cuts in Labour's domestic social programme resulted in the resignation of three Government Ministers and almost certainly contributed towards the 1951 election defeat.

The CPGB attacked the Attlee Government for its willingness to intervene militarily to protect imperial interests - its role in the Malayan conflict being a particular target for vituperation. Even the trust which Communists had accorded Labour on the issue of Indian independence dissipated as the initial euphoria of Attlee's election victory faded.

¹¹⁸ R.P. Dutt, 'Notes of the Month, in Labour Monthly, February 1948, p.38.

Despite claims to have voluntarily handed India her freedom,¹¹⁹ Britain continued to put forward proposals which would safeguard her economic and military interests, in the Communist view, until the nationalist upsurge ensured that she could no longer maintain her grip on power in the territory.¹²⁰

It was the claim of British Communists that successive British Governments had emphasised and encouraged communal differences as a means of 'divide and rule' in India, a policy which resulted in the ascendancy of the Muslim League and the demand for a separate Pakistan nation. The CPGB's continued opposition to partition and its efforts to bring the CPI into line on this issue helped to salvage its standing with the INC, a relationship which was again threatened by the revolutionary policy adopted by Moscow in late 1947. Disappointing though its terms were to the CPGB, India's independence settlement promised to bring compensation to the Party in the form of a Nehru Government; a contingency for which Dutt had long prepared. However, British Communists were immediately forced onto the defensive by the CPI when, in response to the new Cold War line and later under the influence of Maoism, the Indian party identified the Congress Government as the enemy and launched an insurrectionist campaign against the new state until the early 1950s.

The CPI, whose membership rose nearly five-fold between 1943¹²¹ and 1948, could feasibly have played a vital role during the construction of the Indian nation if it had

¹¹⁹ 'British 'Imperialism' is dead,' wrote one British Government official in August 1946, 'in so far as it ever existed, except as a slogan used by our critics. One illustration of this is our policy in India.' CAB 124 1007, no.62, 'Projection of Britain overseas': proposed statement as revised by Mr. Morrison for Committee on Overseas Information Services (01(46)10), 17th. August 1946, in R. Hyam, op.cit, p.309.

¹²⁰ To attempt to do so could jeopardise future access to Britain's strategic needs on the sub-continent, according to the Chiefs of Staff. (R. Hyam, Part 1, 1992, op.cit., Intro., p.xxv). There was real concern that Britain should not be seen to exit with unseemly haste as this would upset her allies, be seen as weakness by her enemies and risk delivering India over to 'the rabble'. (Quoted in Rajani Palme Dutt, 'Gandhi - the last phase', in *Labour Monthly*, Vol. XXX, No. 3, March 1948, p.86). Even Aneurin Bevan argued that 'withdrawal from India need not appear to be forced upon us by our weakness, nor to be the first stage in the dissolution of the Empire. On the contrary, this action must be shown to be the logical conclusion, which we welcomed, of a policy followed by successive governments for many years . . . We should . . . claim credit for taking these initiatives.' Quoted in Andrew Roberts, *Eminent Churchillians*, Phoenix, London 1995, p.78.

¹²¹ Just at the time when the Comintern was dissolved, the CPI's membership began to expand.

developed a consistent and coherent strategy of alliance with Congress. This is what a number of Communists, including British Communists, had been promoting - based on an analysis of Indian political economy - since the 1920s. But the capricious nature of policies created in Moscow to address Soviet interests caused prolonged confusion and divisions among Indian Communists and contributed to the CPI's damaging split in 1964.

As the Indian nation took its first steps along the path of independence, Communists were increasingly turning their attention to the African colonies, which they saw as occupying a special role in the plans of the imperialist powers. Following the loss of India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon¹²² as direct colonies, the African territories constituted the main bulk of Britain's colonial Empire and in consequence, Communists maintained, were regarded as an area where future development could offset the recent territorial losses.¹²³

Furthermore, once the American Government accepted the view that the regeneration of Western Europe's economy depended upon the exploitation of colonial resources, it began looking to Africa as an outlet for its own surplus capital. In this way, the CPGB Central Committee was told in 1949, the African colonies were being used to maintain and sustain capitalism.¹²⁴

¹²² India, Pakistan, Burma and Ceylon were given degrees of independence within ten months of each other.

¹²³ The Party gave the example of plans to establish a British base in Mombasa to replace bases which were under threat in Palestine and Egypt, and the financing by the Colonial Welfare and Development Fund of military communications projects. Harry Pollitt, Political Report to the 20th. National Congress of the CPGB, 21st. February 1947, p.26, (CPGBA).

¹²⁴ Minutes of a Central Committee Meetings, Political Report to the 21st National Congress, 26-28th November, 1949, Section 4, Colonial Liberation, (CPGBA).

CHAPTER EIGHT: AFRICA - PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS

During the second world war, in an effort to counter German propaganda claims of British colonial exploitation, there was an attempt to re-present the concept of Commonwealth as one of 'partnership' rather than 'trusteeship'.¹ Though inter-war propaganda had been careful to depict Britain's colonial role in a benevolent and paternalistic light, associating it with progressive economic change, the theme of colonial development became much more pronounced during the war. This emphasised the benefits which a British victory would bring to her colonies, but the argument was conceived as a measure to deflect nationalism as well as to appease American opinion and to assist wartime mobilization requirements. The colonial welfare and development schemes, introduced in the 1940 and 1945 Acts, thus served a variety of purposes. After the war, the necessity of national reconstruction ensured that the idea of 'partnership' in colonial development continued to be stressed.² Many people in Britain believed Attlee when he claimed in a speech to the Lord Mayor's banquet in November 1947, that 'Imperialism . . . is certainly not to be found in the British Commonwealth'.³ Yet it has recently been argued that during the period of the Attlee administrations, the Empire-Commonwealth was exploited 'in more

¹ R. Smyth, 'Britain's African Colonies and British Propaganda during World War II', in the Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History Vol. 14, 1985. Some colonial activists were arguing that a German victory could not render the colonial peoples' situation any worse than was already the case under British rule.

² In the more egalitarian atmosphere of post-war Britain, the idea of Commonwealth had to be accepted by a much wider social spectrum, as it was the mass of the British people who would be expected to bear the cost of maintaining colonial interests. *Ibid.*, p.70.

³ Quoted in Rajani Palme Dutt, The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire, 1953, op.cit., p.32. Attitudes expressed by elements of Labour's leadership certainly fell far short of international brotherhood. When Hugh Dalton was offered the position of Secretary of State for the Colonies in 1950, he declined, remarking later, 'I had a horrid vision of pulsating, poverty stricken, diseased nigger communities, for whom one can do nothing in the short run, and who, the more one tries to help them, are querulous and ungrateful'. (Quoted in P.S. Gupta, 1975, op.cit., p.336) Dalton's suggested alternative for the post, Aneurin Bevan, who had criticised the Government's bi-partisan foreign policy, was rejected by Attlee as colour prejudiced; 'pro-black and anti-white.' (John Campbell, Nye Bevan and the Mirage of British Socialism, Weiderfeld and Nicolson Ltd., London, 1987, p.216.) The colonies went instead to James Griffiths, a trade union leader and M.P. with no experience of colonial affairs.

ways and with more serious consequences than at any time since overseas colonies were established'.⁴

Squeeze on the Colonies

Dutt had warned in early 1947 of a sharp conflict of interest inherent in the 'special relationship' between Britain and the US - especially in the economic sphere⁵ - and this became publicly manifest in July of that year, when the Attlee Government implemented the terms of the 1945 Anglo-American Loan Agreement which called for free convertibility of the pound. The move precipitated a drastic fall in gold and dollar reserves, forcing the Government into a suspension the following month in order to avoid economic disaster. In the light of this new crisis the colonies, as net dollar earners and holders of large sterling balances,⁶ became even more important to Britain's economic recovery. In subsequent years these territories were squeezed in a variety of ways by the British authorities.

In the African colonies, development schemes financed by government investments through the medium of the Colonial Development Corporation were presented as part of Britain's progressive programme for the welfare of colonial peoples. But from 1947 the CPGB was arguing that the system was simply designed to further the economic and strategic interests of British capitalism and, by involving the use of public money to create profits for capitalist investors, was ultimately impeding Britain's economic development.⁷ One such development initiative was the infamous Tanganyikan

⁴ D.K. Fieldhouse, 'The Labour Governments and the Empire Commonwealth 1945-1951', in R. Ovensdale (ed.), The Foreign Policy of the British Labour Governments 1945-1951, Leicester University Press, 1984, p.95.

⁵ R.P. Dutt, We Speak For Freedom, op.cit., p.13.

⁶ CO 537 1378, nos. 16 and 18, 1-7-46, (Colonial Sterling Balances): minutes by S. Caine, quoted in R. Hyam (ed.), The Labour Government and the End of Empire 1945-1951: Part 2, Economics and Industrial Relations, HMSO, London, 1992, p.19. On 31st. March 1946, the figure fell just short of £800 million, the leading holders being : Malaya, £123 million; Palestine, £119; West Africa, £109 million; East Africa, £100 million and Ceylon, £80 million.

⁷ By following this line of argument, the CPGB was negating the argument put forward by Dutt, that Britain's whole political and economic edifice was built on imperialism and that her crisis was in fact a crisis of imperialism and capitalism.

Groundnuts project,⁸ which was devised primarily to supply fats for the British consumer. The total cost of this project, which was eventually abandoned because of difficulties with land clearance and poor yields, was an estimated £40 million.⁹

Harry Pollitt argued that such schemes, which used cheap labour and raw materials to boost the profits of British capitalists, brought little benefits to the colonial peoples. 'These schemes do not in any way mean the industrialisation of backward countries for the sake of their peoples . . . they imply the creation of a proletariat deprived of any other means of living, and compelled to work at starvation wages so that costs may be low and profits high.'¹⁰ The Marketing Boards, which controlled the corporations involved, largely represented British monopoly interests. During 1946-7, at a time when their oil was selling for £110 a ton, groundnuts were bought at £16.15s a ton; similarly the Gold Coast Cocoa Marketing Board purchased the colony's cocoa crop at £67 a ton in 1947, re-selling it for £177 a ton.¹¹

Communists also highlighted the fact that Africa's sterling-area colonies were exporting more to Britain than they imported from the metropolitan power. The value of Nigeria's exports to Britain rose from £28.5 million in 1950 to £35.3 million in 1951 - a clear indication of exploitation, according to *World News and Views*. The paper pointed out that, in common with Malaya and other dollar-earning colonies, Nigeria, whose biggest

⁸ This was launched in 1946 by the United African Company (UAC), a subsidiary of Unilever - a company which dominated the economy of British West Africa.

⁹ John Strachey, the Minister of Food, admitted in early 1947 that there was an element of risk in undertaking the project (CAB 128 9, CM5(47)3, 13th. January 1947, 'Production of Groundnuts in East Africa': Cabinet conclusions, in Hyam, Part 2, op.cit., p.244.) but, despite obvious problems, a decision to finally abandon the scheme was not taken until January 1951, for fear of harming the 'prestige of this country in all the African colonies.' CAB 128 19, CM1(51)7, 2nd. January 1951, 'Production of Groundnuts in East Africa', op.cit., p.296.

¹⁰ In the Rhodesian copper belt, for example, the average African wage was one twentieth of the wage of Europeans engaged in comparable work, while in West Africa the peoples' land was expropriated for plantations. (Harry Pollitt, Political Report to the 20th. National Congress of the CPGB, February 21st. 1947, p.28, (CPGBA). Dutt, speaking at the 1947 Conference of the Communist parties of the British Empire, contrasted the position of the great monopolies such as the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company, the Rand gold companies and Unilevers, thriving under the auspices of British financial organisations, and the blighted lives of the colonial peoples whom they were exploiting.

¹¹ Harry Pollitt, Political Report to 20th National Congress of the CPGB, op.cit.; Clough, op.cit., p.90

productive enterprises were tin and coal mining, exported large amounts to the US.¹² It is clear that Bevin viewed the development of Africa in particular in terms of harvesting its mineral wealth as a means of strengthening Britain's position in her relationship with the US. The Marshall Plan itself committed the British government to providing America with scarce raw materials from the colonies and Britain had appealed for US assistance in providing investment for development projects.¹³ An example of this co-operation was the 1951 loan for the development of cobalt and copper deposits in Northern Rhodesia,¹⁴ the repayment of which was provided by the export of cobalt, copper, chrome and tungsten to the US.¹⁵

By the late 1940s, British Communists were claiming that the US intended to 'move in' on the British Empire - they warned in 1949 that US exports to the colonies already exceeded those from Britain and that teams of American experts were visiting Africa, searching for suitable areas of investment.¹⁶ It was Dutt's view that, whilst the continent remained subject to exploitation by the more established European imperialist nations, it was also seen by the US as an outlet for her vast capital reserves. He gave the example of old monopolies such as the United Africa Company,¹⁷ which was intensifying its activities and increasing its profits, while relatively new companies such as ICI and Leibigs were moving in, and contrasted the huge profits recorded by these and other industries¹⁸ with the starvation wages paid to their workers.

¹² 'What Next in Nigeria?', World News and Views, Nos. 32 33, July 1954. The subsistence economy of the Nigerian peasantry was rapidly changing to a commodity economy - by 1950, 39% of Nigeria's adult male population was producing for the domestic and foreign market. Prices paid to small farmers for their produce were fixed by the large British monopolies through marketing boards and were often far below world market levels.

¹³ The appeal had been made during talks between Sir Anthony Eden, R.A. Butler and US Government officials in Washington.

¹⁴ The loan was made through the Economic Co-operation Act - an article of the European Recovery Programme.

¹⁵ International Department Report, April 1953, CP CENT/PC 02 14, (CPGBA).

¹⁶ 'Communist Policy to Meet the Crisis', Report of the 21st National Congress of the CPGB, November 1949, (CPGBA).

¹⁷ The UAC saw its profits leap from £165 million in 1949 to £215 million in 1950.

¹⁸ These included the Bisichi Tin Company, the Elder Demster shipping line and the Jantar Nigeria cocoa firm. See R.P. Dutt, 'For a Lasting Peace for a People's Democracy', 9-1-53, Box 134A, (CPGBA).

Lenin had argued in *Imperialism*, that monopolies and the export of capital were the main features of imperialism; in the late 1940s, the CPGB was able to show that monopolies were playing a more decisive role than ever in Britain's economic life and that, while capital development was cut in Britain, British capital was flowing overseas.¹⁹

Furthermore, the Party recognised colonial sterling balances as one of the most important factors in Britain's exploitation of the colonies,²⁰ and that the Labour Government *chose* to take this course rather than to clear its debts.²¹ But Dutt's critique of British colonialism, *The Crisis of Britain and the British Empire*, which he produced during the late 1940s and early 1950s,²² extended the analysis beyond these specific issues and identified Britain's domestic economic difficulties as manifestations of a deeper crisis of the British Empire, one which had been festering since the first world war. It was a position which was far more difficult to justify, given the continuing advance of capitalism.

Earlier studies refute the argument that the Attlee Governments deliberately used the colonies to 'bail out' the British economy in the post-war period,²³ indeed, Ernest Watkins claims that the Attlee Governments 'poured a very considerable capital sum into colonial development',²⁴ yet evidence shows that the Treasury was reluctant to devote resources to the colonies at the nation's expense and that the economic equation worked massively to Britain's advantage. Between 1946 and 1951 the total Welfare and Development budget amounted to approximately £40 million, whilst the colonies' loans to and investments in Britain totalled £250 million in 1951²⁵ - in this manner colonial 'development' was used to finance Britain's post-war reconstruction.

¹⁹ Barclays Bank, for example, made advances for enterprises in South Africa and Rhodesia of over £70 million in 1947 and British banking and commercial interests were actively pursued by subsidiaries throughout the East. H. Pollitt, Political Report, op.cit.

²⁰ Minutes of an E.C. Meeting of the Central Committee of the CPGB (in volumes), May 13th., 1950, (CPGBA).

²¹ Harry Pollitt, Political Report to the 20th. National Conference of the CPGB, op.cit., p.25.

²² R.P. Dutt, 1953, op.cit. Dutt had also published *Britain's Crisis of Empire* in 1949.

²³ P.S. Gupta, 1975, op.cit., p.34, p.313.

²⁴ E. Watkins, *The Cautious Revolution*, Secker and Warburg, London, 1951, p.182.

²⁵ R. Overdale, 1984, op.cit., pp.95-8. Although there was little support for the CPGB's analysis at the time, the Communist position is now widely recognised in academic studies to be a fact. See R. Hyam,

There was some unease at the implications of the Government's colonial policy within official circles. Attlee was warned by the Cabinet Secretary in January 1948, that the decision to rapidly pursue the development of African resources in support of Britain's economic and political position could leave the Government open to charges of imperialism.²⁶ More significantly, Arthur Creech Jones voiced concern that the colonies' essential import needs were still not being met nearly two years after the end of the war²⁷ and questioned the practice of fixing the price of Government bulk purchases of colonial exports, in some cases substantially below current market prices.²⁸

But this opposition soon dissipated; colonial exploitation was justified by claims that both economic recovery in Britain and 'development' in the colonies would progress through mutual involvement in the European system of commodity production.²⁹ Labour's colonial experts were of course heavily involved with the theory and policy of colonial development, and therefore unlikely to provide any real opposition. Both Rita Hinden,³⁰ who served as secretary of the Fabian Colonial Bureau and, despite his reservations,

'Africa and the Labour Government 1945-51', in *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, No. 16, 1988; A.E. Hinds, op. cit.; J. Tomlinson, op.cit., R.F. Holland, 'The Imperial Factor in Imperialist Strategies from Attlee to Macmillan', in *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History*, No. 12, 1984, pp.165-86. Robert Clough claims that, from 1948, 'the Empire was to be milked of all the dollars and superprofits it could earn.' R. Clough, op.cit., p.78.

²⁶ PREM 8 923, 14th. January 1948, (African economic policy): minute by Sir N. Brook (Cabinet Secretary) to Mr. Attlee on possible criticism of the Government, in Hyam, op.cit., p.257. However, further insight into the official attitude is furnished by the remark of one colonial official to Creech Jones following a fact-finding tour of West Africa in 1948. The West African, he complained, 'looks on the Government as a gigantic Father Christmas able to dip in his bag and pull out trains, schools, hospitals, roads, motor cars and everything else.' CO 537 3561, no.1, 27th September 1948, 'West African tour - 1948': Mr. Rees-Williams to Mr. Creech Jones, conclusions and recommendations, in Hyam, Part 2, op.cit., p.219.

²⁷ Quoted in A.E. Hinds, op.cit., p.30.

²⁸ CO 852 989 3, no. 17, March 1947, 'Prices of Colonial Export Products', draft Cabinet memorandum by Mr. Creech Jones, in R. Hyam, op.cit., p.34.

²⁹ John Strachey described the development of primary production in the colonies as 'a life and death matter for the economy of this country', (Quoted in Rajani Palme Dutt, 1953, p.249) and sought to justify the Government's actions by claiming that if Britain did not develop the colonies and dependent territories in this way, others would. See Clough, op.cit., p.93.

³⁰ Hinden claimed that many of the colonial peoples themselves supported the Labour Government's alleged aim 'to help the colonial peoples towards decent conditions of political and economic life before they can withdraw with a good conscience'. Rita Hinden, 'The Changing Face of Empire', in *Socialist Commentary*, Vol. 12, No. 1, October 1947, International Publishing Company, London, p.7, Economic and Political Library, (LSE).

Creech Jones, saw colonial 'development' as the way forward for Britain and the colonial peoples; all but the most vociferous opponents of Empire within the Party accepted the policy, ensuring that it found support in the pages of *Tribune*, as it did in Hinden's *Socialist Commentary* and the publications of the Fabian Colonial Bureau.

To Hinden, who wrote of the 'imaginative boldness of the groundnuts scheme',³¹ it was a shock that the colonial peoples were unimpressed by Labour's 'benevolence'. She complained of a 'repellent' tendency to give a 'sinister interpretation' to every Government action regarding the colonies³² and expressed the priorities of many of her colleagues when she stated that 'British socialists are not so concerned with ideals like independence and self-government, but with the idea of social justice.'³³ This was an allusion to the frequently repeated claim in official and quasi-official circles after 1945, that economic development had to precede political independence. It was an order of priorities which the colonial peoples did not share and pressure for independence continued to grow, but as the colonies moved inexorably towards independence British colonial policy shifted focus in an effort to ensure that power was transferred to pro-British elements.

Constitutional Change

Increasingly, the emphasis was on keeping the colonies and dependent territories 'politically safe' for the West's economic and strategic interests.³⁴ Chastened by earlier mistakes in India and Burma, the Colonial Office was particularly anxious to avoid problems in Africa, where they believed that 'we may still have time to mould events.'³⁵

³¹ Rita Hinden, 'Is Britain Still Imperialist?', in *Socialist Commentary*, Vol. 12, No. 7, April 1948, International Publishing Co., London, p.151, (LSE)

³² Ibid.

³³ P.S. Gupta, 1975, op.cit., p.326.

³⁴ In the words of a Foreign Office memo., Britain 'must ensure that any major obligations it gives up are taken over by its friends'. (Quoted in Curtis, op.cit., p.16) Hinden advocated a continuation of imperial control in those territories where there was a possibility of elements which were not to Britain's liking gaining power. Rita Hinden, 'Is Britain Still Imperialist?', in *Socialist Commentary*, Vol. 12, No. 7, April 1948, International Publishing Co., London, p.152, (LSE).

³⁵ FO 371 91170, B81 44, pp.126,131-133 (Increasing Foreign Office interest in African policy): minutes by R.H. Scott, J.N. Henderson, E.H. St. G Moss, E.J.W. Barnes and J.T. Tahourdin (FO), 9-12 July 1951, in R. Hyam, Part I, op.cit., p.181.

Colonial Office officials³⁶ under directions from Lord Hailey³⁷ had compiled a report in 1946 on the necessity of a review of African native administration policy in view of the predicted spread of nationalism in Africa. Hailey had already emerged during the war as one of the foremost exponents of colonial development - a policy which he linked explicitly to the coming problem of African nationalism in his *Native Administration and Political Development in Tropical Africa* (1942).³⁸ The aim was to rally the African peoples in support of the war effort and the new 'development' policy by offering moves towards 'partnership' in the colonies which would co-opt nascent radicals; but African nationalists proved difficult to satisfy. In the context of Cold War after 1947 the CPGB rejected the various schemes of political reform as counterfeit.

Labour had initially enjoyed Communist support for its programme of political reforms in Africa. Desmond Buckle welcomed Labour moves towards constitutional change in East Africa;³⁹ 'all classes in Kenya will not have failed to notice that since the publication of the white paper, changes have taken place in Britain which will inevitably direct the contemplated changes in Kenya into channels of progress',⁴⁰ he wrote in August 1945. By early 1947, however, his view had hardened. In a speech to the Communist Parties of the Empire Conference, he maintained that 'the peoples of Africa and the West Indies have no effective voice through the legislative assemblies in shaping the economic destinies of their countries.'⁴¹ Sam Aaronovitch, writing on labour conditions in East Africa, echoed this view. He stressed that the bulk of trade unions were still not

³⁶ A.B. Cohen and G.B. Cartland prepared the report on African administration.

³⁷ Lord Hailey was chair of the Colonial Research Committee from 1943-1948.

³⁸ See C.Pratt, 'Colonial Governments and the Transfer of Power in East Africa', in P. Gifford and W. R. Louis (eds), *The Transfer of Power in Africa*, Yale, New Haven 1982, pp. 250-251.

³⁹ Buckle had attacked the proposed new constitution for Nigeria before Attlee's victory in the 1945 election, calling on Labour and other progressive M.P.s to press for an extension of the franchise in the colony and in the number of elected representatives in both the Central and Regional Councils. Desmond Buckle, 'Nigeria's New Constitution', in *World News and Views*, Vol. 25, No. 19, 19-5-45, p.151.

⁴⁰ Desmond Buckle, 'Administrative Reform in Kenya', in *World News and Views*, Vol. 25, No. 31, 11-8-45, p.245.

⁴¹ Desmond Buckle, 'The Labour Movement in Africa and the West Indies', in *World News and Views*, Vol. 27, No. 10, 22-3-47, p.116.

recognised in these colonies, there were, for example, only two registered African trade unions in Kenya in 1947 despite the scale of local support for organised labour.⁴²

It was during this year that the African Governor's Conference took place, involving the first review of African policy under Creech Jones' guidance. This body agreed that the first stage towards representative self-government - some responsibility in local affairs - be introduced as soon as possible in all those African territories where this was not yet the case, especially Nigeria - where the popularity of Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe was causing concern⁴³ - and the Gold Coast, where fears regarding the nationalist leader Kwame Nkrumah's alleged Communist sympathies persuaded the Labour Cabinet to introduce enough constitutional progress to prevent 'the alienation of the moderates'.⁴⁴

The CPGB dismissed the Labour Government's Constitutional concessions as an attempt to 'fob off the demand for real self-government with phoney constitutions which give no real power to the people'.⁴⁵ Harry Pollitt offered some insight into the 'partnership' aspect of the new African constitutions in his report to the 20th CPGB Congress in February 1947. Of the thirty-nine members of the new Kenya Legislative Council, only two represented the African majority and these were nominated by the Government. In Nigeria, an 'official' majority of twenty-one Africans were all nominated by the Governor; only four African members were elected. The colour bar still operated in South and East

⁴² This was demonstrated, he believed by the spread of the dockworkers' strike in Mombasa port. Sam Aaronovitch, 'Labour Conditions in East Africa', in World News and Views, Vol. 27, No. 4, 25-1-47, p.47.

⁴³ It was believed that, if a policy of African local government was not initiated in Nigeria where Azikiwe was regarded with 'Messianic fervour', Britain would find 'the masses apt to follow the leadership of demagogues who want to turn us right out very quickly.' CO 847 35 6 (African administration policy): minute by F.J. Pedler, commenting on Cohen's memorandum, 1st. November 1946, in R. Hyam, Part 1, op.cit., p.118.

⁴⁴ These fears surfaced during February 1948, when rioting broke out in the colony following an incident when ex-servicemen demonstrating against the cost of living were fired upon, leaving two dead. Creech Jones mistrusted Nkrumah and supported his more moderate rival, Joseph Danquah. (See Clough, op.cit., p.99) Although the Gold Coast Africans were considered to be the most advanced politically, it was thought unlikely that internal self-government would be achieved in much less than a generation. CO 847 36 1, no. 9, 'Report of the (C.O. Agenda) Committee on the Conference of African Governors' (chairman: S. Caine), 22nd. May 1947, R. Hyam, Part 1, op.cit., pp.203-4.

⁴⁵ This was the case in the Middle East, Communists argued, where reactionary 'puppet' administrations were set up in order to maintain the hold of the monopolies over oil supplies and in Africa, where the Party called for an end to 'British dictatorship'. Report of the 21st. National Congress of the CPGB, op.cit., p.44.

Africa, where the institutions of hut tax, poll tax and pass laws forced the African to work in the mines and on the plantations, and where trade union rights were suppressed even under a Labour Government in London. British imperialism was modified, he maintained, 'only to the extent that the exploited peoples compel the making of concessions'⁴⁶ It was the position which Emile Burns presented in a speech to the Annual Conference of the WASU in Britain, when he stressed that self-government must mean elected responsible government and that; 'every other form is deception and trickery.'⁴⁷

The Government's 'partnership' strategy was successfully implemented in some instances, notably by Sir John Macpherson's liberal regime in Nigeria, which approached the rise in nationalism with the aim 'not to dam the flood but to divert it into useful channels.'⁴⁸ When such tactics failed⁴⁹ however, the declaration of an 'emergency' in the territory provided a breathing-space in which the colonial authorities could attempt to regain control of the situation and restore the stability necessary to safeguard Britain's interests.⁵⁰ The majority of such 'emergencies' did not go smoothly - events in Malaya, Nyasaland and Kenya provide examples - and were accompanied by repressive measures which gave ammunition to Britain's critics. In an attempt to counter such criticism, the implementation of an 'emergency' was often justified by raising the tired spectre of Communist activity in the colonial territories.

Communism in Africa

In fact, there was very little evidence of Communist activity in Africa at this time. During the late 1940s, both Attlee and his Foreign Secretary voiced concern at the danger of

⁴⁶ Harry Pollitt, Political Report to the 20th. National Congress of the CPGB, op.cit., p.29.

⁴⁷ 'African Students in Conference' in World News and Views, 7-8-48, p.330.

⁴⁸ Quoted in Frank Furedi, op.cit, p.99

⁴⁹ The Colonial Office attempted to take the initiative on the introduction of reforms in an effort to pre-empt any Treasury objections - it was considered imperative that the transition from British colony to Commonwealth member and ally should not be disrupted by economic considerations.

⁵⁰ In October 1948, the Secretary of State proposed the establishment of civil and military resources to deal with any 'emergencies' which might occur in the colonies, also of a Central Intelligence Department to evaluate the impact of external events on these territories.

Communist infiltration in the African colonies,⁵¹ doubtless fed by intelligence reports such as those received during October 1948, which alleged that there had been 'increasing evidence in recent weeks of a Soviet intention to foment disturbances in British Colonial territories, especially Africa.'⁵² But these same reports could only find evidence of Communist activity among the Indian population of Zanzibar,⁵³ the existence of two unconnected Communist groups in Egypt and a Communist-inspired National Liberation Front in Sudan.⁵⁴ Nevertheless, it was enough to reinforce *a priori* fears of Communist expansion as evinced by Bevin's anxious note to Attlee in November 1948, stating that ' . . . sooner or later the Russians will make a major drive against our position in Africa.'⁵⁵

Colonial Political Intelligence also reported on 'quasi-nationalist movements' in Kenya,⁵⁶ where the situation was 'coloured by inter-racial and inter-sectional animosity'; and Uganda, where 'the threat of violent agitation is never far from the surface';⁵⁷ of a 'growing race consciousness' in Nigeria and an 'ominous . . . prevalence of anti-white feeling' in the Gold Coast.⁵⁸ In the light of the Foreign Office's belief that the first step in

⁵¹ For Creech Jones however the possibility that incipient nationalist movements in areas such as Nigeria and Kenya 'may well be a danger to the development of the territories concerned', was more a cause of anxiety than Communist infiltration. (DO 35 2380, no. 3, 6th. January 1948, (Development of Africa): memorandum by Mr. Creech Jones, commenting on Field Marshall Montgomery's memorandum, in R. Hyam, *op.cit.*, p. 201) Field Marshall Montgomery warned of the danger of Communist-led nationalist movements in Africa in a 1948 memo.

⁵² Intelligence Reports to the Secretary of State for War. CO 537 2758, no. 4, I.H. Harris, 21-10-48, in R. Hyam, *op.cit.*

⁵³ Which, they believed, gave rise to the danger of 'a subversive influence upon sections of the whole African population'. CO 537/2677, East African Intelligence Reports, July-September 1948, (PRO).

⁵⁴ CO 537 5263, A Survey of Communism in Africa, prepared by the Colonial Office, the War Office and the Commonwealth Relations Office, August 1950, p.3, (PRO). James Klugmann had developed contacts with Hillel Schwartz - a leading member of the left-wing Egyptian group, Iskra, and with Abdel Khaled Majoub, leader of the Sudan CP. (Richard Kisch, *op.cit.*, pp.42-3). There were reports of a volatile situation developing in the West Indies with fears of growing communist support in Trinidad and suspicions that the Jamaican nationalist movement had Communist leanings. (CO 537 2677, Colonial Political Intelligence, pp.8-9.) The situation in Cyprus, where a strong Communist party (AKEL) was demanding union with Greece through self- government, was also giving concern. CO 537 2677, Colonial Political Intelligence: Summary No. 1, 1948, p 13, (PRO).

⁵⁵ FO 800 435, ff. 118-120, 6-11-48, (Communism in British overseas territories): minute by Mr. Bevin to Mr. Attlee, in R. Hyam, *op.cit.*, pp.336-337.

⁵⁶ CO 537 2677 Colonial Political Intelligence, *op.cit.*, pp.5-7.

⁵⁷ CO 537 2677, East African Intell Reports, *op.cit.*

⁵⁸ In British Guiana also, there was reported to be 'an increase . . . in the strong racial feelings among the educated sections of the Indian and African communities.' CO 537 2677, Colonial Political Intelligence, *op.cit.*, pp.5-7.

the Communist's move to overthrow imperialism would be to 'support all nationalist and racial discontent',⁵⁹ these developments gave cause for concern. British and US officials identified potential Communist support among the various nationalist or national liberation movements in different parts of the continent⁶⁰ and feared that this might foster Communist influence in certain parts, notably South Africa - which was regarded as 'a dangerous field for the spread of Communism'⁶¹ - and West Africa'.⁶² The Foreign Office, which claimed that activities in the colonies were normally directed by the CPs of the colonial power concerned, identified individuals such as Nkrumah and Azikiwe who were 'known to be in touch with the British CP'.⁶³

In Nigeria, the CPGB's hopes lay with the National Council of Nigeria and the Cameroons (NCNC),⁶⁴ an organisation which supported the united anti-imperialist front and whose General Secretary, Azikiwe, had shown himself willing to endorse Communist policies. However, friction rapidly developed between the Council and sections of the Yoruba tribe - whose leadership had traditionally dominated political activity in the colony - represented by the Egbe Omo Oduduwa (EOO). The CPGB consequently dismissed the EOO and its supporters as allies of imperialism, but the continued turmoil of early

⁵⁹ FO 371 80125, no. 1017, 1st. May 1950, 'Note on the aims, strategy and procedure of the Communists in Africa': brief no.13 for the London Meeting of Foreign Ministers, in R. Hyam, *op.cit.*, p.355-6.

⁶⁰ Support which materialised, they maintained, because 'primitive peoples' follow leaders, presumably like sheep. Although, the 'pull of parochial loyalties has so far proven stronger than the overall unity preached' by the Communists. CO 537 5263, A Survey of Communism in Africa, *op.cit.*, p.3, pp.4-5.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Although in South Africa, where the CP was considered to have a considerable influence among 'the native, Indian and coloured elements', (FO 371 80125, 'Notes on the aims, strategy and procedure of the Communists in Africa, *op.cit.*') 'it could be assumed that recent developments had made the task of Communists in the Union more difficult', (CO 537 5263, Communist Influence in the African Continent, Summary of Discussions at the FO between officials of the US State Department and of the FO and other Government Departments, 20-9-50, pp.1-2, (PRO) a reference to the apartheid system. Restrictive legislation introduced by the Malan Government was presented as a move against Communism, but was in fact directed against a far wider section of the South African population, as the terms Communist and Communism were defined as being 'applicable to great number of shades of dogma or activity'. (Quoted in 'Solidarity with the Working People and Communist Party of South Africa', Statements of the E.C., 6-5-1950, p.29, (CPGBA) The CPGB hinted at possible M.I.5 involvement in the drafting of the legislation, after learning of a visit to South Africa by Sir Percy Sillitoe, head of that organisation.

⁶³ FO 371 80125, 'Notes on the aims, strategy and procedure of the Communists in Africa' in R. Hyam, *op.cit.*, p.355.

⁶⁴ The NCNC, which was formed in 1944, enjoyed great popularity in the colony. It waged a campaign against British administration which included a national strike in 1945 and a deputation to the Colonial Secretary in 1947.

Nigerian politics made it virtually impossible for the Party to establish a sound base in the colony.

Conditions in East and Central Africa were even less conducive to Communist advance than those of West Africa. Here white settler power acted to stifle political development and dissent, the African bourgeoisie was virtually non-existent and African unions were still not recognised in all the territories. Despite the lack of political raw material, the CPGB involved itself in issues which affected the area such as the plan for a Central African Federation⁶⁵, which it opposed, and the Seretse Khama campaign,⁶⁶ in which the CP took a leading role. The Party also managed to establish contact with S.G. Amin and M.I. Fernandes of the East African Indian National Congress and by 1950 could claim links with two prominent Kenyan leaders - Kenyatta and Peter Mbiu Koinange, a leading figure in the Kenyan African Union.⁶⁷ Earlier attempts at Communist organisation in the colony had been undertaken by Makhan Singh, a member of the CPI who formed the East African Trade Union Congress in 1935.⁶⁸ Singh kept in contact with the CPGB during the post-war years and received its support - when he was arrested for his political activities for example, Dutt wrote with a promise to consult legal advisers on his behalf⁶⁹

⁶⁵ The plan, which triggered widespread opposition from the local African population, was condemned by the Communists as a move to create 'a vast dominion under white rule from the southern frontier of Sudan to the Limpopo'. ('British Imperialism and the Liberation Movement in Africa', Report of the International Department, April 1953, CP CENT/PC 02 14, (CPGBA). The Labour Government had accepted the plan by 1951, sparking a campaign which was waged through the pages of World News and Views, the Daily Worker and African Newsletter and featured in a special supplement of the WFTU's journal. CPGB speakers also addressed meetings organised by the labour movement on the subject.

⁶⁶ Khama, a Bechuanaland chief, was ordered into exile by the Labour Government as a result of pressure brought by South Africa in reaction to his marriage to a white woman. The affair obtained symbolic significance for British anti-imperialists and the CPGB was dominant in the running of the Seretse Khama Campaign Committee, of which Communist member Billy Strachen was secretary. S, Howe, op.cit., pp.196-7.

⁶⁷ Koinange, who was in touch with CP member Sam Aaronovitch whilst studying in England during the late 1940s, exercised 'considerable influence' within the Union, according to Colonial Office Intelligence, (CO 537 2677, East African Intelligence Reports, op.cit; Colonial Political Intelligence, op.cit.) and was believed to be 'establishing himself as the British CP's link with Kenya'. CO 537 5263, A Survey of Communism in Africa, op.cit.

⁶⁸ CO 537 2677, A Survey of Communism in Africa, op.cit. Singh had been active in Kenya since 1934.

⁶⁹ CO/537 5306, Colonial Political Intelligence Summary, No.7, July 1950, (PRO).

Elsewhere in East Africa, Communist progress was very slight. In Uganda, Semakula Mulumba - who spent two years at the London School of Oriental and African Studies - was believed by officials to be in contact both with the CPGB and the Soviet Embassy.⁷⁰ I.K. Musazi, representative of the Uganda African Farmers' Union in London, was also suspected of involvement with the CPGB and of disseminating Communist propaganda in Uganda. In Southern Rhodesia, a small Communist cell led by the general secretary of the Reformed Industrial and Commercial Workers' Union of Africa, Charles Mzingeli, reportedly received support from the CPGB,⁷¹ whilst Communist publications from South Africa such as *Guardian* and *Inkululeka* were said to be circulating inside Northern Rhodesia.

In the West Indian colonies, Colonial Intelligence suspected The West Indian National Party, the Workers' Freedom Movement⁷² and the Caribbean Federation of Youth to be channels of Communist doctrines. Jack Kelshall and John La Rose, both of whom held positions of influence in these organisations, were 'well known for Communist affiliation'⁷³ according to intelligence reports, which also claimed that La Rose operated a communist cell in Port-of-Spain, where copies of the Cominform's publication *For a Lasting Peace, for a Peoples' Democracy* were circulating.^u The British Guianese progressive leader Dr Cheddi Jagan - who formed the Peoples Progressive Party in 1950 - and his wife Janet Rosenberg were proclaimed to be 'avowed Communists . . . in connection with the British CP',⁷⁴ and Vincent Bowles was named as a Trinidadian Communist who was attempting to set up cells throughout the colony.

⁷⁰ CO 537 2677, East African Intelligence Reports, op.cit; CO 537 2677, Colonial Political Intelligence, op.cit. The Bakata Party, which Mulumba represented while in London, was held to be a potential breeding ground for Communists and the Makerere College was closely monitored for evidence of insipient Communism.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Whose stated aims included the setting up of a 'West Indian Socialist Republic'.

⁷³ CO 537 5306, Colonial Political Intelligence Summary, op.cit.

⁷⁴ CO 537 2677, East Africa Intelligence Reports, op.cit.; CO 537 2677, Colonial Political Intelligence, op.cit.

A survey of Communism in Africa conducted in 1950 was reassured that, whilst nationalist leaders in Kenya, Nigeria and the Gold Coast had been in touch with the British Communist Party, 'there is so far no indication that their views are held by the bulk of their followers'.⁷⁵ It was concluded that the national liberation movements in British, Belgian or Portuguese territories were not Communist-led⁷⁶ - neither were Communists dominant in the national liberation movements of Nigeria and the Cameroons, East Africa, Uganda, Kenya, the African Union, Sudan and Somaliland. However, 'the democratic elements' - those with Communist sympathies - in these organisations had established contacts with 'progressive centres' such as Communist Parties, the WFTU, the IFDW, Partisans of Peace and others',⁷⁷ and this was seen as a cause for concern. Overall, there was no evidence of any direct Soviet interference in the African colonies; unrest was generally of an economic or nationalist character and any Communist sympathies tended to spring from the experiences and aspirations of the African peoples themselves.

Communist Theory

The fear that Communist theories would appeal to colonial nationalists was real, nonetheless; during the late 1940s, the Colonial Office was producing a fortnightly review of Communism in the colonies,⁷⁸ on the basis that 'the battle against Communism is . . . a battle against ideas'.⁷⁹ During the inter-war years the subversive ideas in question took

⁷⁵ CO 537 5263, A Survey of Communism in Africa, op.cit.

⁷⁶ Ibid. Communism was, however, deemed to be more of a threat in French colonial territories. There were established C.P.s in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia, while in French West Africa the Rassemblement Democratique Africain (RDA) - a powerful nationalist movement with branches in all French territories except Mauritania - was considered to have been completely 'under the sway' of the French CP since 1946. (Ibid.) The reasons for this success rested with the strength of the French Communist Party and the political process of direct representation from the French colonies which brought figures like Lamine Senghore and A. Cesaire to serve in the French Assembly.

⁷⁷ FO 371 80125, 'Note on the aims, strategy and procedure of the Communists in Africa', op.cit., p.355.

⁷⁸ These were the responsibility of Sir Marston Logan, a former Governor of the Seychelles, 1942-1947. CO 537/2758, no. 4, 21st. October 1948, (Communist infiltration of the colonies): notes by I.H. Harris of a CO internal discussion (18th October), in R. Hyam, Part 2, op.cit., pp.334-336.

⁷⁹ The Colonial Office warned that Communism must not be allowed to pose, as it had in the past, as 'the champion of dependent peoples against their cynical and self-seeking oppressors'. CO 866/49, no.1, C OOC 1, 'Reflections on Colonial Office Organisation': note by H.T. Bourdillon for Colonial Office Organisation Committee (Extract), 10th. May 1948, in R. Hyam, Part1, op.cit., p.323. There was seen to be a need to divert the future rulers of Africa from 'pure politics' or the realm of theory, in which Communism was proving to be attractive, to the 'solid discipline' of government administration, beginning with experience in local government. R. Hyam, Part1, op.cit., Intro., p.xxx.

the form of a blanket endorsement of colonial freedom, allowing Communists to pose as the 'champions of the dependent peoples against their cynical and self-seeking oppressors'. In the years following the second world war, however, the CPGB developed a more thoughtful analysis which took into account the specific conditions present in each individual territory.

In a speech to the Conference of Communist Parties of the British Empire, Dutt offered some insight into developments in the Party's attitude towards the African colonies. Whilst reiterating Communist support of the right of self-determination for all peoples, he went on to differentiate between countries such as India, Palestine and Egypt - which had reached a stage of 'national consciousness' - and countries which did not as yet possess a 'developed' nationalist movement which was both based upon and representative of the people. The African colonies, with the exception of the South African Republic, were placed in this latter category. In their case, the emphasis was placed on the fight for democratic and civil rights, 'upon which a popular nationalist movement could build.'⁸⁰ 'I would say that we would be guilty of the most empty phrases . . .' he declared, 'if we were to be satisfied with an abstract political formula for the general right of self-determination, and make no effort whatever to grapple with the actual problem of the steps forward that require to be taken in each particular territory according to the circumstances of that territory.'⁸¹

Trade union organisation⁸² was one aspect of the colonial peoples' democratic and civil rights which Communists claimed was being undermined by the British Government's policy of cracking down on labour militancy. Labour disputes in Nigeria in 1945, 1949 and 1950, South Africa in 1946, the Gold Coast in 1948 and Kenya in 1950 were quickly

⁸⁰ R.P. Dutt, *We Speak For Freedom*, op.cit., p.48

⁸¹ Ibid., p.27.

⁸² The growth of secondary industry after the second world war had created a need for skilled African labour and the working-class was expanding. Life in the rapidly-growing towns was often a desperate struggle, fuelling the demands of the workers.

suppressed by the authorities, who initiated and encouraged 'tame' trade unions in an attempt to pre-empt future disturbances.

Radical efforts to counter what was regarded as interference by the metropolitan power were mainly co-ordinated through the World Federation of Trade Unions. The WFTU, which was comprised of trade unions from the Western powers (until a full-blown Cold War developed after 1947), the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, as well as labour organisations from the far East and colonial countries such as Malaya, Jamaica and Trinidad,⁸³ sustained a constant stream of protest against the violation of workers' rights in the colonies.⁸⁴ The colonial peoples' case was put to the International Labour Organisation (ILO),⁸⁵ and to the United Nations Economic and Social Council by the WFTU, and the Federation's journal, *World Trade Union Movement*, publicised the impact of imperialism on the colonies.⁸⁶

During the period of its membership of the WFTU, the British TUC was both anxious not to facilitate Communist activity within the colonies and concerned not to support measures which clashed with the interests of the Colonial Office.⁸⁷ It consequently vetoed a Soviet proposal in 1947 to provide funds to assist colonial unions and went

⁸³ The WFTU claimed 56 affiliated national centres, representing a total of 70 million trade unionists.

⁸⁴ A resolution adopted at the organisation's London and Paris Conferences in February and October 1945, committed the WFTU to 'undertake to raise, in the near future, the workers in colonial territories to the same level as those of other countries'. WFTU, Pan-African Conference, Dakar, 10-13th. April, 1947, (IISH).

⁸⁵ The ILO, which was formed after the First World War, was comprised of national delegations which included representatives of trade unions, employers and the state.

⁸⁶ Jack Woddis, *The Mask is Off*, Thames Publications, June 1954, p.7.

⁸⁷ During the late 1930s, the British TUC volunteered its services in sorting out 'those colonial trade unions that were not in the 'right hands', as Walter Citrine put it, from those that could be trusted to follow constitutional ways'. (See Peter Weiler, *British Labour and the Cold War*, Stanford University Press, 1988, p.39; D.I. Davies, 'The Politics of the TUC's Colonial Policy', in *Political Quarterly*, Vol. 35, No. 1, January-March 1964, p.26). Trade unionists were subsequently appointed as Labour Advisers to the colonial labour movement in an attempt to encourage non-political unions and defuse labour militancy. (Jack Woddis, *The Mask Is Off*, Thames Publications, June 1954, p.10). This contrasted with the normally low priority previously accorded to organised colonial labour by its metropolitan counterparts - for example, there were no genuine representatives of colonial trade unions at International Labour Organisation conferences until 1945. See Marjorie Nicholson, *The TUC Overseas, the roots of policy*, Allen and Unwin, London, 1986, p.168.

against its own policy⁸⁸ by opposing calls in 1948 for colonial workers to be afforded the same conditions as workers in the colonial power.⁸⁹ But, despite such efforts Communists had gained a foothold in the trade union movements of Egypt, Nigeria, Northern Rhodesia, and Kenya by 1950.⁹⁰

Speaking at a WFTU Pan-African Conference, held in Dakar during April 1947, E.F. Small, the Gambian trade union leader, explained that the press were excluded from the proceedings 'so as to protect the delegates of the African trade unions from subsequent reprisals, in the event of the Conference allowing itself to be led into making violent attacks against the authorities in their country'.⁹¹ Such militancy led right-wing trade union leaders to eventually break with the organisation and set up the rival International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU), which established a permanent centre in Accra in 1953 and launched a monthly journal, *West African Worker*.

Colonial Nationalists React

This support of colonial workers' rights, together with the Communists' post-1947 attacks on colonial 'development' and Constitutional change - virtually the only considered left-inspired criticism of the Government at this time - won them the gratitude of African nationalists based in Britain.⁹² Azikiwe⁹³ - who subsequently became Prime Minister of an independent Nigeria - and Nkrumah both wrote of their sense of betrayal at Labour's failure to implement pledges made whilst in opposition. 'I regret that our hopes in the Labour Party were completely dashed to pieces,' Nkrumah stated in his autobiography, 'in fact we saw little difference between Labour colonial policy and that of the Tories.'⁹⁴

⁸⁸ The TUC's 1946 Congress had passed a resolution which made similar demands.

⁸⁹ D.I. Davies, *op.cit.*, p.30.

⁹⁰ CP CENT/PC 02 14, International Department Report, April 1953, (CPGBA).

⁹¹ WFTU, Pan-African Conference, *op.cit.*.

⁹² As early as April 1946, colonial activists had used a Fabian Colonial Bureau Conference as a platform on which to express their disappointment with the Labour Government's colonial policies. D. Goldsworthy, *Colonial Issues in British Politics*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1971, p.132.

⁹³ Nnamdi Azikiwe, 'Nigerian Leader Thanks Communist M.P.s', in the *Daily Worker*, 9-10-49.

⁹⁴ Kwame Nkrumah, *Ghana: the Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah* Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd., Edinburgh, 1957, p.58.

I.T.A. Wallace Johnson, a close friend of Creech Jones with whom he had worked in the IASB during the 1930s, produced a pamphlet in which he expressed his disappointment at the record of the Secretary of State for the Colonies during his four years in office. He had hoped, he wrote, that Creech Jones would 'transform ideas to ideals'; instead he had 'accepted uncompromisingly the creed of colonial officialdom'.⁹⁵ But perhaps the most damning indictment came from Joe Appiah, the West African activist and president of the WASU, who later remarked of Labour's colonial policy; 'I count this as one of the greatest betrayals of friends by friends in all history.'⁹⁶ To these men, the stance taken by British communists marked them out as potential allies.

Colonial Nationalists in Britain

Pan Africanism

By 1945, the growth and development of Pan-Africanist ideas presented British Communists with a potentially formidable rival ideology with which to contend. The moderate approach of earlier years had sharpened as new influences were brought to bear and events such as the Abyssinian crisis shaped the consciousness of African political activists. By the outbreak of the second world war, Pan-Africanism was already developing in confidence and direction; the added effect of the conflict was to politicise the movement and install a radical leadership.

The mid-1940s was a time of great activity by colonial nationalists in Britain - Makonnen described the country as 'seething . . . like an African pot'.⁹⁷ The Pan-African Federation,⁹⁸ which organised the fifth and most significant Pan-African Congress, had

⁹⁵ I.T.A. Wallace Johnson, Exit Creech Jones, ACJ, Box 2, File 2, Item 5, Creech Jones Papers, Rhodes House Library, Oxford.

⁹⁶ J. Appiah, The Autobiography of an African Patriot, Praeger, London, 1990, p.150.

⁹⁷ R. Makonnen, 1973, op.cit., p.147.

⁹⁸ The PAF subsequently developed links with the Parliamentary Labour Party, supplying Labour M.P.s with information on African issues. The organisation also worked with the Reverend Michael Scott, who had acted as a contact for the CPGB member and LAI courier, Michael Carritt, when he arrived in India in 1936. Scott, who was campaigning for the rights of black South Africans at this time, met with leading

been formed in 1944 from a total of thirteen organisations with Dr. Peter Milliard⁹⁹ as its president and Ras Makonnen as its general secretary.¹⁰⁰ During the second world war, these activists had established a base in Manchester,¹⁰¹ where Makonnen set up the African Co-operative Union and the Ethiopian Teashop¹⁰² - both of which operated as social centres for Africans and West Indians in Britain - and a number of clubs, including the Cosmopolitan, which Kenyatta ran for a period. However, the main impetus for Makonnen's activities was political, not social and he subsequently established the Pan-African Publishing Company, which produced pamphlets by Kenyatta and Padmore in addition to a monthly periodical, *Pan-Africa*.

Following a preparatory meeting in March 1945¹⁰³ to discuss the convening of a fifth Pan-African Congress, the event was scheduled to begin on October 15th 1945, a week after the Paris conference of the WFTU,¹⁰⁴ with which it shared a number of delegates. Unlike its four predecessors the Congress, which was attended by around 200 delegates,¹⁰⁵ was more representative of colonial nationalists and radical thinkers and consequently adopted a more militant stance. Delegates committed themselves to practical action rather than rhetoric, agreeing to pursue a programme of action to secure the liberation of the African

black radicals when he stopped in Britain en route to plead his case at the United Nations in 1948. R. Makonnen, op.cit., p.178.

⁹⁹ Milliard was a practicing M.D.

¹⁰⁰ G. Padmore, 1956, op.cit., p.149; Hakim Adi, 'The 1945 Manchester Pan-African Congress', in North West Labour History, No. 20, 1995-6, p.5.

¹⁰¹ Makonnen claimed that they felt at home in Manchester, where the people 'were human and warm and you never were made to feel a stranger.' (R. Makonnen, 1973, op.cit., p.136.) He also identified with Engels, who had lived in Manchester and supported Marx, 'I felt we were almost mimicking history', he wrote. Ibid., p.164.

¹⁰² The profits from these enterprises were used to finance the Pan-African movement and to aid the black community in Britain. Peter Fryer, Black People in the British Empire, Pluto Press, London, 1988, pp.338-9.

¹⁰³ Those involved included Makonnen, Milliard, Padmore, Ken Hill, Kentatta and Critchlow. (Ken Post, op.cit., p.513.) The Congress organisers, their spirits lifted by the election of Attlee's Government in the July, sent invitations to both the ILP and the Fabian Colonial Bureau.

¹⁰⁴ Desmond Buckle, the CPGB's main South African contact in Britain, represented the Party at the WFTU's Paris session held between 25th September and 8th October.

¹⁰⁵ For details of the Congress see: Imanuel Geiss, op.cit.; P.O. Esedebe, Pan-Africanism: the Idea and Movement, 1776-1963, Washington, 1982; C. Legum, 1976, op.cit.; Adi, 1995, op.cit.

colonies. Activists were urged to return to their own countries and fight for freedom, instead of waging the campaign through sympathetic white opinion in Britain.¹⁰⁶

Many of those attending the Manchester Congress subsequently served in the governments of their respective countries following independence, thus instilling the proceedings with special significance. Dr. Hastings Banda, who later became President of Malawi was one example, as was Nkrumah, who claimed that the Congress 'provided the outlet for African nationalism and brought about the awakening of African political consciousness.'¹⁰⁷ Communists did participate in the Congress on an individual basis; Desmond Buckle collaborated on the compilation of the draft manifesto for instance, and Wallace Johnson was also involved in an organisational capacity. The delegate representing South Africa, Marco Hlubi, had CPGB links¹⁰⁸ and a number of CPGB members attended the Congress, including local CPGB members Len Johnson and Wilf Charles.¹⁰⁹ However, British Government officials who scrutinised the event pronounced themselves satisfied that the proceedings were not influenced by the political left.¹¹⁰

The West African National Secretariat

The influence of Communist ideas was more apparent within the West Africa National Secretariat (WANS), which was founded in December 1945 charged with the task of applying the Pan-African agenda to West Africa. The organisation's members included Nkrumah, its secretary, and I.T.A. Wallace Johnson¹¹¹ who took the chair; Nigerian student Bankole Akpata and Bankole Awoonor Renner - both of whom had Communist connections - and Margot Parish, a leading CPGB member who served on the WANS executive.¹¹² With so many of its key workers sharing or sympathising with the

¹⁰⁶ R. Makonnen, *op.cit.*, p.168.

¹⁰⁷ K. Nkrumah, Autobiography of Kwame Nkrumah Panaf Books Ltd., London, 1973, p.44.

¹⁰⁸ Ras Makonnen, *op.cit.*, p.159. Hlubi was a Zulu dancer with the Negro Theatre Company in London.

¹⁰⁹ Michael Herbert, Never Counted Out, Dropped Aitches Press, Manchester, 1992.

¹¹⁰ H. Adi, 1995, *op.cit.*, p.13, n.19.

¹¹¹ Representing the Sierra Leone West African Youth League.

¹¹² Kwame Nkrumah, 1957, *op.cit.*, p.55; I. Geiss, *op.cit.*, pp.411-3; J.O. Langley, Pan-Africanism and Nationalism in West Africa, Oxford, 1974, pp.356-365; Marika Sherwood, 'Kwame Nkrumah: the London years 1945-47', in Immigrants and Minorities, Vol. 12, Part 3, November 1993.

Communist doctrine, it was unremarkable that the organisation adopted a left perspective, claiming the support of the Communist movement for its aim of a united and independent democratic federation of West Africa, a model described by Awoonor Renner as a 'West African Soviet Union'.¹¹³ The monthly journal published by the Secretariat, *The New African*, which was edited by Nkrumah and Bankole Akpata, reflected this outlook by taking a Marxist outlook.¹¹⁴

The organisation's secretary, Kwame Nkrumah, who subsequently became leader of the independent Ghana, was one of the most significant colonial nationalists operating in Britain after the second world war. His arrival in Britain in May 1945 had been preceded by a glowing testimonial from CLR James,¹¹⁵ who arranged that he would be met upon his arrival by Padmore and Joe Appiah¹¹⁶ and taken to the WASU Hostel. During his time in Britain, Nkrumah immersed himself in Pan-African politics - in addition to his secretaryship of the WANS, he became regional secretary of the Pan-African Federation and served as vice-president of the WASU during late 1945-6.¹¹⁷ But he also attended CPGB meetings and was in contact with Party members - for example, while attending the Manchester Pan-African Congress he stayed with Wilf Charles.¹¹⁸

Nkrumah's Communist sympathies during this period are clear. His use of the dialectic in contributions to *WASU*, in which he wrote of the 'cultural synthesis' which results from

¹¹³ *World News and Views*, 7-8-48, p.330; *Communist Review*, December 1948, pp.383-4.

¹¹⁴ K. Nkrumah, 1957, op.cit., p.56-7. A major initiative of the WANS was the formation of the Coloured Workers Association of Britain, which catered for the needs of colonial workers in this country, especially seamen. The Secretariat eventually concentrated its efforts on the organisation of these workers, leaving the WASU to focus on colonial students. Ibid., pp.58-9.

¹¹⁵ James, who had become acquainted with Nkrumah while both were living in the US, recognised that he was a radical, rather than a liberal. See R. Makonnen, 1973, op.cit., p.154.

¹¹⁶ Appiah, who arrived in London in January 1944, had already met Nkrumah in the US. (See Joe Appiah, 1990, op.cit., p.163.) Restrictive legislation introduced by the Malan Government was presented as a move against Communism, but was in fact directed against a far wider section of the community, as the terms Communist and Communism were defined as being 'applicable to a great number of shades of dogma or activity'. (Quoted in 'Solidarity with the Working People and Communist Party of South Africa, Statements of the Executive Committee, May 6th, 1950, p.29, (CPGBA). The CPGB hinted at possible M.I.5. involvement with this legislation following a visit to South Africa by Sir Percy Sillitoe, head of that organisation. Ibid.

¹¹⁷ Marika Sherwood, November 1993, op.cit.

¹¹⁸ Michael Herbert, op.cit.

the meeting of two cultures; the 'struggle of opposites' which leads to the emergence of a new culture,¹¹⁹ reveal an interest in Marxist theory. While in Britain he formed 'The Circle', a small, secret group of students pledged to the creation and maintenance of a Union of African Socialist republics,¹²⁰ an organisation which Hakim Adi concludes, 'functioned as a vehicle for the transmission of the Marxism of the British Communist Party.'¹²¹ He also wrote admiringly in his *Autobiography* of leading British Communists such as Emile Burns, Palme Dutt and Harry Pollitt,¹²² carried a CPGB membership card - although he denied ever joining the Party - and frequently used the term 'comrade' in correspondence.

These Communist leanings¹²³ brought a rebuke from some of Nkrumah's fellow Pan-African activists; he was accused of Machiavellism, and warned that his Communist links could harm the Pan-African movement.¹²⁴ This latter concern was to some extent justified - within twelve months of its inauguration, the WANS and Nkrumah were both placed under observation by the Colonial Office, which produced a report detailing Nkrumah's contacts with CPGB members William Rust, Michael Carritt and Maud Rogerson.¹²⁵

New International Society

Radical Pan-Africanists like Makonnen challenged Communist claims to represent the interests and aspirations of the colonial peoples, accusing them instead of cynically using the colonial issue in the furtherance of their own political ends. This hostility, which

¹¹⁹ Philip Garigue, January 1953, op.cit.

¹²⁰ K. Nkrumah, 1957, op.cit., Appendix B, p.303.

¹²¹ H. Adi, 1994, Thesis, op.cit., p.182.

¹²² K. Nkrumah, 1957, op.cit., p.51.

¹²³ Nkrumah returned to the Gold Coast in November 1947 and was almost immediately appointed general secretary of the United Gold Coast Convention (UGCC). Following a UGCC split in June 1949, he headed the radical Convention Peoples' Party, which was elected to office in February 1951, while its leader was serving a prison sentence. Padmore acted as advisor to the Nkrumah administration, which led its country to independence in 1957, and CLR James visited regularly during the early years, but dissatisfaction grew as Nkrumah, who described himself as both a Christian and a Marxist Socialist, presided over a burgeoning bureaucracy and a growing personality cult.

¹²⁴ R. Makonnen, op.cit., pp.262-3.

¹²⁵ M. Sherwood, November 1993, op.cit.

sprang from a desire for racial self-sufficiency, extended on occasions to organisations such as the Movement for Colonial Freedom and even the ILP was seen as a potential threat to the PAF's independence. At one point, Makonnen, who accused Harry Pollitt of planning to transform the British Empire into a Communist Empire,¹²⁶ reproved both Padmore and Wallace Johnson for contributing to *New Leader*, although he admitted that 'there had always been groups in the white world which had been prepared even to risk their own lives for this type of idealism'.¹²⁷

Such attitudes did have a damaging effect on the CPGB's efforts to establish links with colonial workers and activists in Britain during the post-war years. In 1946, three black Communist members, Len Johnson, Wilf Charles and Syd Booth, established the New International Society (NIS), in Moss Side, Manchester,¹²⁸ an initiative which led to the establishment of the Cotton Club. The aim of the Club, of which Len Johnson was secretary,¹²⁹ was to 'promote and encourage respect for Human Rights and for Fundamental Freedoms for all without distinction as to Race, Sex, Language or Religion' and to 'provide a centre for Cultural and Physical Recreation where people of all lands can meet fraternally and in harmony'.¹³⁰

The NIS itself campaigned for the rights of coloured seamen in Britain and of black people worldwide, holding regular meetings with guest speakers from the colonies and former colonies as well as speakers from colonial organisations in Britain, such as the India League. One campaign which was fought during 1947-8, focussed on the plight of six young Afro-Americans sentenced to death after being convicted for allegedly murdering a store keeper. This culminated in a rally organised jointly by the NIS,

¹²⁶ R. Makonnen, *op.cit.*, p.159.

¹²⁷ R. Makonnen, 1973, *op.cit.*, p.117.

¹²⁸ By mid-1949, membership had risen to 250, with a further hundred belonging to a Liverpool branch. (Michael Herbert, *op.cit.*; *Daily Worker*, 12-10-49.) Leading figures in the Liverpool NIS included Ludwig Hesse, a Gold Coast seaman; Hugh Campbell from the West Indies and Olwyn White, who stood as a CPGB candidate for the Abercrombie ward in Liverpool.

¹²⁹ Other officers included Russel Talbot, president; S. Gandy, chair and N. Harding, treasurer.

¹³⁰ Michael Herbert, *op.cit.*

Lancashire and Cheshire Federation of Trades Councils and *Reynolds News*, which attracted speakers like Paul Robeson and Horace Newbold, secretary of Manchester and Salford Trades Council.¹³¹

There was considerable political opposition from the Pan-African Federation to the NIS, which Makonnen condemned as 'Communist dominated'. In deference to such criticism, the role of the British Communist Party in the NIS was not officially acknowledged, although many CPGB officers and members were also members of the organisation and the Party's International Department was in regular communication with Len Johnson.¹³² Elements of the Party leadership realised that greater efforts were needed in recruiting from among the black and coloured population and to encourage them towards a more independent role in respect of anti-colonialist and anti-racist campaigning. Maud Rogerson of the CP's International Department, cautioned that 'the NIS is too closely linked with the Party, and the club appears to have become a popular rendezvous for white contacts patronised by a few coloured people.'¹³³ Such warnings were fruitless however, the involvement of the CPGB proved a terminal encumbrance to the NIS and the organisation folded in the early 1950s.

West Indians and the CPGB

The CPGB was able to exploit conflicts which arose between measures taken to alleviate Britain's post-war labour shortage and the racist attitudes which had been inculcated throughout her imperialist past. In 1948, the S.S. Empire Windrush brought the first wave of immigrant workers from the West Indies to Britain in response to a recruiting campaign by British employers. The racism and discrimination which these workers and their families subsequently encountered in the 'Mother' country, proved a shattering experience for many. In the light of these experiences, the CPGB's uncompromising line on anti-

¹³¹ Ibid. The US Supreme Court quashed the verdicts in July 1949 and ordered a retrial.

¹³² M. Herbert, op.cit. Len Johnson and Wilf Charles corresponded with Wallace Johnson after he returned to Sierra Leone.

¹³³ Quoted in Ibid.

colonialism and anti-racism - it was the only political party in Britain at this time to totally oppose all forms of immigration controls and quotas on Commonwealth citizens¹³⁴ - proved attractive to some of the more radical arrivals, who subsequently joined the Party.¹³⁵

A West Indian branch of the CPGB operated in London from the early 1950s to the middle of the decade, reaching a membership of around fifty, most of whom were students.¹³⁶ The Party also established a national West Indian Advisory Committee, which was represented on the International Committee and on the EC, and organised special meetings for West Indian members during the year, which were generally well attended.¹³⁷ The majority of West Indian trade unionists in Britain were members of the London branch of the Caribbean Labour Congress (CLC)¹³⁸ - established in 1945 to campaign for a federation of free West Indian states - which was proscribed by the Labour Party and the TUC as a Communist front organisation.¹³⁹ CPGB member Billy Strachen served as branch secretary from 1947, working with members who subsequently rose to prominence in their own countries, such as Forbes Burnham, later Prime Minister of British Guiana and Michael Manley of Jamaica.¹⁴⁰

One prominent Trinidadian activist who flirted with Communism in his early years at Oxford was Eric Williams,¹⁴¹ who founded Trinidad's Peoples' National Movement (PNP) in January 1956 and dominated that country's politics for nearly three decades. His

¹³⁴ The CPGB worked for the repeal of the Commonwealth Immigration Act and actively campaigned against racism.

¹³⁵ The issue was raised in the House of Commons by a Conservative M.P., who was concerned to read in the Daily Worker that many of those arriving on the Empire Windrush were 'already happily placed in Communist homes'. House of Commons Debates, Hansards, Vol. 453, Col. 614, 8-7-48.

¹³⁶ The West Indian Students Union itself was an organisation which welcomed people from all political persuasions.

¹³⁷ Trevor Carter, Shattering Illusions, Lawrence and Wishart, London, 1986, p.56.

¹³⁸ Richard Hart was secretary of the CLC from 1947.

¹³⁹ Representatives from the London CLC attended the Communist-led World Youth Festivals - the first of which took place in Yugoslavia in 1947.

¹⁴⁰ S. Howe, op.cit., p.212. By 1950 the London CLC, hampered by its Communist connections and receiving little practical support from the CPGB which had its own financial and manpower problems, was largely defunct.

¹⁴¹ CLR James, Party Politics in the West Indies, Vedic Enterprises, Port of Spain, 1962, p.158.

work - the most important of which, *Capitalism and Slavery*,¹⁴² presented a radical interpretation of history based on an economic determinist argument - has been interpreted by some analysts as a Marxist account of colonialism in the West Indies.¹⁴³ However, although Williams developed close relations with activist such as Nehru, Norman Manley, Nkrumah, Leopold Senghor and Aime Cesaire, he shunned the more radical ideas of Padmore, James and others and always denied any Communist Party connections.¹⁴⁴

African Students in Britain

During the post-war period, the CPGB intensified its activities among African students studying in Britain. Denis Healey - then secretary of the Labour Party's International Department - received a communication from the secretary of the Fabian Colonial Bureau, Rita Hinden, in July 1948, in which she complained; 'There are now over 3,000 colonial students in this country . . . While the Labour Party does nothing to meet and greet these people, the Communist Party does everything. The Communists bring out a regular African Newsheet . . . accompanied by a letter inviting visits to their Colonial Department and expressing a readiness to take up any grievances or problems. I need hardly add that these offers are often taken advantage of.'¹⁴⁵

This view was supported in a letter to the *Sunday Times*, published in January 1951, which claimed that Communists were 'only too eager to meet disgruntled overseas students, undermine their loyalty and ensure their return home as trouble-makers.'¹⁴⁶

¹⁴² Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery*, Capricorn Books, New York, 1966.

¹⁴³ Ken Boodhoo (ed.), *Eric Williams - the man and the leader*, University Press of America, London, 1986, p.52.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid, p.122; Selwyn R. Cudjoe, *Eric Williams Speaks: essays on colonialism and independence*, Calaloux Publications, Massachusetts, 1993, p.146. Williams moderated his stance once he became Prime Minister of Trinidad and gradually moved closer to the US causing a rift with his erstwhile colleague and supporter, C.L.R. James. See CLR James, *The Future in the Present*, Allison and Busby, London, 1977, Intro.

¹⁴⁵ David Goldsworthy, op.cit., p.146.

¹⁴⁶ Quoted in H. Adi, Thesis, 1994, op.cit, p.222.

There was some justification for this concern,¹⁴⁷ Joe Appiah revealed that, on first arriving in London, he was met on the platform by CPGB members offering accomodation to 'colonial comrades' visiting Britain. Appiah had already organised to stay at a WASU hostel, but the attraction of such an offer to a weary and often bewildered traveller was obvious.¹⁴⁸

The Colonial Office itself had been considering its reaction to the increasing numbers of African students studying in Britain since the early 1920s,¹⁴⁹ mindful of the fact that most of these students would occupy important positions upon their return to Africa. The need for co-operation with the emerging educated classes of Africa - the future ruling-class - was fully appreciated by the British authorities.¹⁵⁰ The possibility that these people would return home with a hostile view of Britain was seen by the Fabian Colonial Bureau to be 'so important a matter, that even our major schemes for the development and welfare of the colonies must be made secondary to the vital question of putting this right'.¹⁵¹

Ultimate responsibility for supervising policy towards and activity in the colonial student organisations lay with the Communist Party's International Department,¹⁵² which was

¹⁴⁷ A further source of concern was the International Union of Students (IUS), which boasted a number of affiliated colonial student bodies (CO 537 5306, Colonial Political Intelligence Summary, op.cit.) and whose headquarters were in Prague - increasingly the base for Moscow's anti-colonial campaigning. The announcement in November 1948 by the Central Union of Czechoslovak Students, the local member body of the IUS, that twenty scholarships would be awarded annually to foreign and specifically colonial students, intensified fears, (CO 537 5263, A Survey of Communism in Africa, op.cit.) and prompted West African governments to co-operate in arrangements to endorse colonial students' passports for the U.K. only. CO 537 5263, Draft Summary of a Meeting in the Foreign Office, op.cit.

¹⁴⁸ J. Appiah, op.cit., p.146. This view was borne out by the son of Archdeacon Banks - a student at Edinburgh University - who suggested that the Communists' influence among colonial students reflected the fact that they were prepared to take an interest in and champion the grievances of these students when other organisations were not. CO 537 5306, 'Colonial Political Intelligence Summary, op.cit.

¹⁴⁹ H. Adi, Thesis, 1994, op.cit., p.47; Sunday Times, Letter, 7-1-51.

¹⁵⁰ CO 537 2574 11020 30/2, 'Political Significance of African Students in Britain', memo. from Mr. Rees Williams to Sir Thomas Lloyd, 16-2-48, (PRO).

¹⁵¹ CO 537 2574 11020 30 2, 'Notes on Conclusions to be Drawn from the Fabian Colonial Bureau Conference at Pasture Wood', 17 18-1-48, (PRO).

¹⁵² Organisations in which they were interested included the Nigerian Union of Students, the National Committee of Fedind, the London Committee of Indian Majlis, the WASU, the West Indian Students Union, the South African Students Union, the Malayan Students Union, the Egyptian National Committee, the

involved with various colonial student bodies, including the Co-ordinating Committee for Colonial and Dominion Students,¹⁵³ with whom it collaborated in organising a Sheffield Youth Peace Festival.¹⁵⁴ One significant factor which facilitated the Department's recruitment of colonial students was the operation of the colour bar, an issue which also concerned the Colonial Office. Officials were particularly worried about those colonial students not studying under Government sponsored schemes who, it was believed, were 'more amenable to suggestions from members of the British Communist Party that they were subject to racial discrimination'.¹⁵⁵ Such fears were heightened when CPGB members Omoba Aderemi and Uche Omo - a leading WASU member - led students in a strike over racialism and the shortage of accommodation in 1950.

West African Students' Union

The WASU's leadership continued to follow a moderate line in the post-war years - Lapido Solanke manoeuvred the organisation towards co-operation with the Labour Party and many WASU members worked for the Party's 1945 election victory. The Union's growing influence in official circles was manifest in the formation of a West African Parliamentary Committee, consisting mainly of Labour M.P.s and WASU members, which served to keep Labour informed on West African opinion.¹⁵⁶ By the 1950s, the Colonial Office was sufficiently reassured of the WASU's position to provide financial support for its hostel provision, regarded as an acceptable alternative to the Communists' embrace.¹⁵⁷

Sudanese Students Union and the Iraqi Students Association. Report of International Department to Political Committee, CP CENT PC 02 15, (CPGBA).

¹⁵³ This Committee was probably the same organisation as the Co-ordinating Council for Colonial Student Affairs, formed by the NUS in 1948, which included East and West African Student Unions and a South African students group.

¹⁵⁴ The organisational work of the Festival, which was attended by over two hundred and fifty colonial students, was repeated for the World Festival of Youth, held in Bucharest in August 1949.

¹⁵⁵ CO 537 5263, Draft Summary of a Foreign Office Meeting, *op.cit.* At the end of 1949, 1,371 private and 864 assisted African students were registered in the U.K. and Eire; of these, 40 were claimed by the CPGB as members. See CO 537 5263, A Survey of Communism in Africa, *op.cit.*

¹⁵⁶ The Committee met once a month to discuss colonial issues and was attended by such high profile figures as Attlee, Bevan, Brockway, Reginald Sorenson, Lord Listowel, Richard Acland, Lord Stansgate, Herbert Morrison and Leslie Hale. J. Appiah, *op.cit.*; Philip Garigue, January 1953, *op.cit.*

¹⁵⁷ An earlier document had urged 'most strongly that a special allocation should be made from Colonial Development and Welfare funds of a sum of £200,000 for the acquisition and equipment of student hostels

During the late 1940s however, the organisations' radical wing - a younger element which was more open to Communist ideas - began to take the initiative. This to some degree was the result of a general disenchantment with the Labour government's colonial policies and its lack of movement towards self-determination for Britain's African colonies, although the British authorities considered that the trend was 'mainly due to the activities of the CPGB'.¹⁵⁸ Whatever the source, it enabled the CPGB to develop close links with a section of the WASU leadership. Ben Bradley, Reginald Bridgeman and Arnold Ward were all invited to attend WASU meetings and Emile Burns, who ran classes on Marxism for West Africans,¹⁵⁹ addressed WASU's annual Conference in July 1948.¹⁶⁰ More significantly, Nigerian Communist Party members held official positions within the WASU - Ade Thomas, the Union's national organiser and his fellow Communist Uche Omo both attended the International Union of Students' Council meeting in Warsaw as WASU observers.¹⁶¹

In August 1950, the British authorities considered there to be 'a fairly strong minority of Communist supporters in WASU',¹⁶² just over a year later Solanke considered most of the Union's E.C., including its president, Joe Appiah and secretary, Adenekan Ademola, to be leading Communists.¹⁶³ However, there was little evidence of Communist ideas being put into practice once the students returned to their own countries - for example, of one hundred and sixty Sudanese students who returned home in the period 1946-8, none

and clubs' in an attempt to counter Communist influence. CO 537 2574 11020 30 2, 'Colonial Students in the U.K. and Eire', n d, c.1948, (PRO).

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., p.224.

¹⁵⁹ Confidential Draft Discussion Document for the International Department, CP CENT/INT 24, (CPGBA).

¹⁶⁰ World News and Views, 7-8-48.

¹⁶¹ Draft Document, CP CENT INT 24, op.cit.

¹⁶² CO 537 5263, A Survey of Communism in Africa, p.8, op.cit. According to this same report, the CPGB had forty members from among colonial students at this time.

¹⁶³ His views were shared by Lord Milverton, who claimed that WASU was 'a Communist medium for the contact of West Africans when they came to this country'. Quoted in H. Adi, Thesis, 1994, p.212.

were reported to be engaged in Communist activities¹⁶⁴ despite CPGB claims to have direct contact with the Sudanese National Liberation Front.¹⁶⁵

Nigerian's in Britain

By the summer of 1949, the CPGB's Africa Committee had set up separate West and East African Committees, charged with the task of distributing the journal *African Newsletter* in East and West African territories. An East African Student's Union was formed and a small number of East African students attended CPGB classes, although the Party admitted in 1953 that it had been unable to recruit any Kenyan members in London.¹⁶⁶ By this time, the CPGB had established relations with several African groups operating in Britain - the Nigerian Union; the Manchester-based Africa League; The Gambia League and the Gold Coast Union, for example,¹⁶⁷ but was particularly successful in attracting Nigerian members.¹⁶⁸

During the 1945 WFTU Congress, the Party secured a useful contact in T.A. Bankole, President of the Nigerian TUC, who subsequently contributed an article on the Nigerian labour movement to *Inside The Empire*. Further support came from H.O. Davies, founder of the Nigerian youth movement, who approached the CPGB upon his arrival in Britain in 1947, explaining that he had been recruited to Marxism by a Party member who had been stationed in Nigeria during the war.¹⁶⁹ By the end of the following year, a number of students claiming to be members of a Nigerian-based Marxist group which published the *Nigerian Statesman*, were working with the CPGB; these included Ade Ademola, Ayo Ogunsheye and M.A. Aderemi. Later, as the Party developed its contacts with Nigerian

¹⁶⁴ CO 537 5263, A Survey of Communism in Africa, op.cit.

¹⁶⁵ Report of the International Department to the Political Committee, op.cit., CP CENT/PC 02 15, (CPGBA).

¹⁶⁶ 'Marxist Groups in Nigeria', Draft Document for Commission, 4-8-53, International Department Correspondence, Box 134A, (CPGBA).

¹⁶⁷ Report of the International Department to the Political Committee, 25-6-53, Box 257A, (CPGBA).

¹⁶⁸ Nigeria was Britain's largest African colony.

¹⁶⁹ Draft Document, CP CENT INT/24, op.cit.

labour organisations, the *Labour Champion* - Nigeria's first worker's paper¹⁷⁰ - sent Idise Dafe to Britain join the *Daily Worker* and train as a Marxist journalist.¹⁷¹

But the Party's advancement in this area was accompanied by problems which triggered a number of internal disagreements. The sudden influx of Nigerian members - around 150 were recruited following the 1950 election¹⁷² - initially led to the establishment of separate Nigerian branches, also known as 'Robeson Branches', in London. This arrangement technically contravened the CPGB's Leninist rules and, following objections from the London District Committee and the Central Organisation Department, these organisations were dissolved. It was a decision which caused deep resentment among the new recruits and was opposed by the International Department, which expressed alarm at the possibility of alienating the newly-acquired Nigerian members. Palme Dutt, who had favoured the idea of grouping the politically inexperienced Nigerians together in order to protect them from political 'contamination',¹⁷³ was obliged to clarify Party policy on recruitment and training of cadres in April 1951.¹⁷⁴

The fact that Communist ideology did not separate the fight against racism from the central struggle against class oppression often led to accusations that the Party was neglecting the concerns of its African and West Indian members. One incident which illustrates the Party's inattention to developments among black activists in Britain occurred in 1951, when the Party's West African sub-committee¹⁷⁵ was unsuccessful in an attempt to form a West African Youth and Student Organisation. The Party remained

¹⁷⁰ The *Labour Champion* was established by the United Africa Company Workers' Union in 1950.

¹⁷¹ Draft Document, CP CENT INT 24, op.cit.

¹⁷² John Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., p.258.

¹⁷³ Dutt feared that, without the protection of numbers, the Nigerians would be targeted by rival political groups working as a front for the British authorities. See Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ This stipulated that the formation of national branches within Britain was not normal Party organisation and that colonial workers and students should be members of ordinary CP branches. All branches should report to their District Committee unless a CP existed in the members' own country, in which case they should report to the centre. Minutes of a Central Committee Meeting, report of NEC Meeting, 14th April, 1951, (CPGBA).

¹⁷⁵ The sub-committee consisted of Ade Thomas, J. Vaughan, V. Ibeneme, I. Dafe, Jonathan Tetteh, Uche Omo, A. Onibogi and Milton Brown.

unaware of the fact that a similar organisation, the African Workers and Students Association (AWSA), had been set up independently of the CP until early 1953, when the International Department was informed of its existence by three CP members active within AWSA. The value of this thriving group was immediately recognised by the Party - the International Department reported that 'tender nursing' of AWSA could produce some 'very fine working-class and student cadres'.¹⁷⁶

The volatile nature of Nigerian politics was reflected in the loyalties of Nigerians based in Britain - the establishment of an Action Group, a branch of the EOO, in London during 1945¹⁷⁷ ensured that this was the case - causing tensions which occasionally tested the unity of the CPGB itself. Following the emergence from the NCNC of the more left-wing Zikhist movement in early 1949, the situation grew more complex. Sections of the CPGB gave encouragement to Nduka Eze, a member of the NCNC leadership who helped establish the Zikhist movement and later became its President. Eze was an active trade unionist, being general secretary of the Nigerian National Federation of Labour, NFL, and of the United Africa Company Workers Union, UACWU.¹⁷⁸ The CPGB, believing the development of Marxism in Nigeria to be 'of the greatest urgency',¹⁷⁹ in order for Communists to be poised to take over the leadership of the national liberation movement, praised Eze for constantly inspiring and educating 'the young men of this movement in the spirit of Marxism'.¹⁸⁰

Following the establishment of the Nigerian National Labour Congress (NLC)¹⁸¹ in February 1950 - the same month as the Zikhist movement was banned - and the Congress'

¹⁷⁶ Report of a meeting between the International Department and Peter Brown, a Nigerian CP member, and two other African comrades, one Nigerian, one Somali, 25-1-53, Box 134A, (CPGBA).

¹⁷⁷ Emile Burns for example, took a more favourable view of the Egbe Omo Odudwa.

¹⁷⁸ Marxist Groups in Nigeria, Box 134A, op.cit.

¹⁷⁹ International Department Statement on Nigeria, Part 1, Economic Background, January 1953, Box 134A, (CPGBA).

¹⁸⁰ Draft Discussion Document, CP CENT INT 24, op.cit.

¹⁸¹ The NLC was formed from an amalgam of the NCNC, the EOO and other groups as a response to intensified repression in the colony, marked by the shooting by Nigerian authorities of striking miners at Enugu. 'Nigeria's Bloody Friday', CP CENT INT 25 01, (CPGBA).

affiliation to the WFTU, Eze, the organisation's general secretary, contacted Harry Pollitt and was welcomed as a 'reliable Marxist'. However, support for Eze, whose opponents included his erstwhile colleague Azikiwe,¹⁸² was not unanimous within the CPGB. Maud Rogerson, for example, did not hold him in high regard and there were fears that the Party was 'backing the wrong horse'.¹⁸³ These concerns proved to be well founded; Eze proved unable to sustain his political ascent, losing his positions both in the NLC and UACWU as the Nigerian trade union movement split in 1951.¹⁸⁴

During the early 1950s, several groups claiming to be the official Communist Party of Nigeria were active in the colony.¹⁸⁵ A despairing Harry Pollitt had to stress in a letter to Nigeria that no-one returning to that country from Britain had the authority to speak for the CPGB, after several individuals implied CP recognition for their various organisations. Dutt reinforced this message by stressing that recognition would be conditional upon the group agreeing a 'correct' Marxist analysis in line with the main aspects of the CPGB's policies and programme.¹⁸⁶ Underlying these numerous divisions however, the main split remained that between the two tribal groupings, the Yoruba and the Igbo, who were judged to be offering 'opposite answers to the question of the future of the CP of Nigeria'.¹⁸⁷

Despite the CPGB's relative success in recruiting Nigerian activists, like the British authorities it was aware that these recruits were not continuing their involvement with Marxist politics upon their return home, a fact which was confirmed in a report prepared by Dafe following a fact-finding visit to Nigeria in 1953.¹⁸⁸ Furthermore, suspicions

¹⁸² Eze was alleged to have personally profited from a scheme which allocated scholarships to East Germany. Although he was acquitted of any wrongdoing, the allegations damaged his standing with the CPGB.

¹⁸³ Draft Document, CP CENT INT 24, op.cit.

¹⁸⁴ 'The Dilemma of Imperialist Strategy in Nigeria', CP CENT INT 24, (CPGBA).

¹⁸⁵ These included the Freedom Movement, which was set up in 1950; the League, established in February 1951; the United Working Peoples Party (UWPP), formed in July 1952 out of the Committee for Peoples' Independence and the Convention Peoples Party.

¹⁸⁶ 'Marxist Groups in Nigeria, Box 134A, op.cit.

¹⁸⁷ 'The Weakness of the Trade Union Leadership', CP CENT/INT/24, (CPGBA).

¹⁸⁸ I. Dafe, Corrected Report on Visit to Nigeria, 27-5-53, Box 134A, (CPGBA).

were raised within the Party with regard to the purity of the political ideas expressed by some Nigerian members and the possibility that these views might be shared by long-standing, trusted Party workers.¹⁸⁹

In a move to calm tensions, Barbara Ruhemann of the Africa Committee was appointed to prepare a report on the political situation in Nigeria, but the report's conclusions¹⁹⁰ - which dismissed the Action Group as an imperialist-backed organisation and condemned Yoruba chiefs as a semi-feudal, semi-bourgeois compradore group - only inflamed supporters of the EOO. Grievances and rivalries continued to simmer throughout the early 1950s and Desmond Buckle and Peter Blackman were among those who complained to Party leaders over their cavalier treatment of Nigerian members.¹⁹¹ Deteriorating relations prompted the Party to reinstate the Nigerian branches and to establish a Nigerian Commission in May 1953, in an effort to salvage the situation.¹⁹²

Although the Commission's report¹⁹³ discounted some of the more serious accusations levelled at the CPGB leadership, it ordered a revision of the Political Committee's analysis of the Action Group and rebuked Dutt and Burns for their failure to resolve the situation earlier. However, these conciliatory moves were not sufficient to heal the Party's troubled relationship with its Nigerian members, the underlying cause of which lay with the immature nature of Nigerian domestic politics. By 1956, the Party could still see no

¹⁸⁹ It was alleged that two members of the Kensington branch, O.A. Bameshe - a founder member and one-time secretary of the London branch of the Action Group - and his colleague, Emanuel, had both expressed 'deviant' views and had claimed that Desmond Buckle shared these views. (Letter, unsigned to Rajani Palme Dutt, 1-4-53, Box 134A, (CPGBA). Margo Parish warned that E.E. Obahiagbon, a self-declared Titoist, was involved in organising fortnightly meetings on Marxism, which were attended by between thirty and forty people and chaired by Ade Thomas, a hitherto trusted Party worker. (Letter, Margo Parish to Palme Dutt, n/d, Box 134A, (CPGBA). Members were also concerned that the WASU journal, WASU - a publication with a widespread readership - was carrying the same line on Nigeria.

¹⁹⁰ The report was presented to the International Department and the Political Committee in June 1952,

¹⁹¹ Both I. Dodiye and Bameshe resigned amid accusations that the CPGB leadership exhibited a chauvinistic and autocratic attitude towards the Party's African members. Dutt was attacked for his continued support of the NCNC. Rajani Palme Dutt, 'People of Nigeria Rise in Struggle for Freedom', from For a Lasting Peace, For a People's Democracy, 9-1-53, Box 134A, (CPGBA).

¹⁹² This body, which consisted of Palme Dutt, Idris Cox, Barbara Ruhemann, Emile Burns and J.R. Campbell, did not contain any Nigerian members, their role being limited to a consultative one. Nigerian Commission, 3-6-53, Box 134A, (GPGBA).

¹⁹³ The body presented its report in 1954.

sign that Marxist elements in the colony had 'reached a clear political outlook and programme which can form the basis for an organised CP.'¹⁹⁴ Uniting the various factions behind such a programme remained the responsibility of the CPGB, however, and in March of that year, Dutt pleaded in vain to the CPSU for help in solving the matter.¹⁹⁵

Conclusion

After 1947, Britain's economic position deteriorated further as her dollar debt grew, triggering an intensification of exploitation in her colonies, especially the African territories, where 'development' was the euphemism employed to justify the process. At the same time, constitutional reforms were being used as a device to quieten demands for freedom and to promote elements friendly to British interests. During these years, the only significant section of the British left to critically assess and monitor these developments was the CPGB. Clearly, Cold War perceptions of sub-Saharan Africa as a bolster for British and US economic and strategic goals, together with evidence of the evolving consciousness of the African peoples, encouraged Communists to take a greater interest in developments on that continent. Thus, whereas the Party had said little to suggest that it had major misgivings about Labour's African policies before Cold War attitudes hardened in the summer of 1947, it fell in line with Soviet policy and resumed sustained attacks upon the colonial policies of the British Labour Government after the Cominform was set up in October of that year.

Many on the left of the labour movement accepted Labour claims that its colonial programme would bring progress to the colonial peoples - Arthur Creech Jones, for example, perceived it to be an enlightened course - others were prepared to support the policy for the benefits it brought to the domestic economy. This enabled Communists to gain a measure of credit with those colonial nationalists who had invested great hopes in a

¹⁹⁴ Nigerian Report, January 1956, CP CENT INT 24, (CPGBA). Despite a claim by the Party in July 1954 that conditions in Nigeria were conducive to the development of a cohesive Marxist party able to lead a united anti-imperialist front. World News and Views, July 1954, nos.32 3, pp.630-633, pp.649-652.

¹⁹⁵ John Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., p.259.

Labour Government only to feel betrayed when their expectations were not met. British Communists attempted to build on this confidence in their efforts to win support amongst African and West Indian political activists in Britain and the colonies.

The CPGB's work in establishing links with radicals in the African and West Indian colonies was impeded by the rise of anti-Communist paranoia, which regarded all liberation movements in the colonies as part of a Communist conspiracy. This greatly added to the general repressive atmosphere in which they were forced to operate and led to tighter restrictions on the publication and distribution of Communist literature in the colonies, which obstructed the dissemination of communist ideas. However, the main problem in establishing the Party in Africa, where the time for organisation was believed to be 'over-ripe',¹⁹⁶ remained the low level of modern class development. Nationalist movements were developing rapidly throughout the region, but lacked a central guiding force - this was particularly seen to be the case in Kenya, the Gold Coast and Nigeria. Simultaneously, British communists were having to compete with a more radical form of Pan-Africanism which dismissed the 'narrow confines of class'¹⁹⁷ intrinsic to communist doctrine and regarded conventional white-dominated politics with suspicion. One implication for the CPGB of this growing self-confidence was increasing criticism that the Party was not fully addressing the interests and concerns of its African and West Indian members. In fact, the Party's analysis gave key importance to the recruitment and political education of Africans in Britain - just as Indian groups in Britain had been of great significance during the 1920s and 1930s, the same was true of Africans in the 1950s. But, given the greenness of the political movement in Africa, this was not an easy task. In the case of Nigerian politics for example, the British Party was faced with a number of embryonic political movements claiming Communist authenticity but unable to surmount entrenched tribal divisions. Despite the Party's failures however, many appreciated its fundamental anti-imperialist and anti-racist credentials. As one colonial member

¹⁹⁶ James Klugmann, Minutes of a Political Committee Meeting, 7-5-53, CP CENT/PC 02/15, (CPGBA).

¹⁹⁷ G. Padmore, *op.cit.*, p.379.

explained to Trevor Carter; 'I stayed in the CP because I disagreed with those who claimed that the racism of the left was an inherent feature of their attitudes.'¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁸ Trevor Carter, *op.cit.*, p.62.

CONCLUSION

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the majority of early British Socialists tended to base their objections to Empire on the Radical approach to imperialism; essentially a mix of humanitarian concern for the exploited peoples and a consideration of British interests. The absence of a theoretical spine in the debate surrounding the colonial Empire allowed for the expression of views which were all too prevalent in a nation accustomed to ruling over two thirds of the earth. When commenting upon colonial issues, even some leading figures on the left exhibited attitudes which were paternalistic, chauvinistic and at times, racist.

Following the formation of the CPGB in 1920/21 however, an alternative anti-imperialist discourse was introduced on the British political left. The new Party received instruction on Lenin's dynamic analysis which, in identifying the time as ripe for revolutionary socialism, positioned anti-imperialism at the centre of Communist doctrine and stationed the colonial liberation struggle in the front line of the war against international capitalism. It was the clear and uncompromising nature of Lenin's theory of imperialism which, when contrasted with the position adopted by the Labour leadership whilst in office, enabled Communist ideas to gain ascendancy on the left in Britain, most notably within the ILP.

This same analysis included a practical strategy of action through which to implement the theory - including temporary tactical alliances with the colonial national bourgeoisie and the non-Communist left and the utilisation of struggles for colonial independence in the advance towards international Socialism. It was in the conversion of theory into practice that complications arose, however. The Comintern itself was divided on the issue of collaboration with the national bourgeoisie for example, while the essential expediency of a policy which pursued alliances with nationalist leaders in order eventually to overthrow them and supported nationalist causes as a means of ultimately rendering nations obsolete,

was almost certain to engender mutual distrust and suspicion. These problems were compounded by an increasing tendency within the Communist movement to regard the advancement of the international revolution as an extension of Soviet interests.

When the CPGB, a minor player on the domestic political stage, was assigned the core task of nurturing colonial liberation movements within the British Empire, it was able to call on the knowledge and commitment of a small group of members with a special interest in colonial issues. These activists were instrumental in the establishment and operation of various anti-colonial initiatives within Britain, they ensured that the Party kept up a steady stream of criticism of successive British governments' colonial policies and worked to spread Communist ideas among Indian and African students studying at British universities, many of whom went on to occupy leading positions in post-independent India.

British Communists played a significant role in conceiving and convening the Brussels Congress - a highly successful initiative which provided an important point of contact between colonial nationalists and sympathetic Western opinion, exposing each to the ideas and aspirations of one another and establishing the basis for future co-operation. Together with Reginald Bridgeman - who, whilst not a CPGB member, was a loyal 'fellow traveller' - the Communists formed the bedrock of the British LAI. This organisation was the most effective of the national sections, despite its repudiation by the leadership of the labour movement for its Communist connections. The League campaigned for Indian independence and the recognition of China's nationalist government, it championed the democratic rights and civil liberties of all colonial peoples and worked to expose racism in Britain and elsewhere. As the organisation which arose from the Brussels Congress, it was able to utilise the connections made there and provided a useful contact point and support for African and Asian nationalists in Britain.

Despite early hopes that the League would develop into a mass anti-imperialist movement, the organisation rapidly fell victim to a number of problems, the most damaging of which were the unrelenting hostility of the leadership of the LSI and the change in Comintern policy from 1928-1934, though it has to be added that interest in colonial issues within European labour movements was minimal. As with earlier British initiatives, these factors, together with the Party's small and over-worked membership, set severe limits on what could be achieved. The League, a child of the united front period, failed to realise the potential it had promised immediately after the Brussels Congress; the trust and goodwill it had built up destroyed by sectarianism.

From the mid-1920s, the CPGB provided emissaries to assist in the formation of Workers' and Peasants' Parties and in the organisation of Indian labour. This was done so ably that the Indian authorities, fearful of an alliance between Communists and radical nationalists, constructed the Meerut trial in an effort to halt their progress within the labour movement and sour their relationship with the nationalist left. Although the arrest and subsequent trial of the leading activists constituted a setback to the Indian revolutionary movement, the overall effect was not as the authorities anticipated. Much sympathy was generated for the defendants in India, where Nehru championed their cause and in Britain, where the campaign for their defence and later release included many non-Communists. In a final irony, the trial proceedings provided valuable publicity for the activists and their ideas. Greater damage was effected by the Comintern's sectarian line which dissolved the WPPs, split the Indian trade union movement and the Meerut campaign and excluded Indian communists from the INC's great civil disobedience movement.

The adoption of the ultra-left line also threatened the CPGB's relationship with Indian nationalists - the Party pursued a consistent policy of co-operation with bourgeois nationalists based on their own analysis of the Indian situation until 1928, when the colonial bourgeoisie were denounced by the Comintern and the CPGB's analysis was condemned. It appears that the Party reacted by restricting its public comment on Indian

affairs during the class-against-class period in an attempt to soften the impact of Communist attacks upon Nehru and the Congress left, who were still regarded by Dutt as potential allies. From the mid-1930s, the popular front eased the ban on cooperation with the bourgeois nationalists allowing Dutt and others in the British Party the opportunity to repair relations at a time when Nehru was warming to Communist ideas. It was a task made all the more difficult by the reluctance of the CPI to abandon sectarian views but, as Moscow became increasingly absorbed by the political situation in Europe, the British Party was given greater freedom to guide the CPI towards a more conciliatory attitude to the nationalists. It was the prioritising of the fight against fascism which caused support of colonial liberation struggles to be held in abeyance however, and cost the Communist movement the support of some of its leading black activists.

The Comintern had begun to target black activists from the late 1920s, in the belief that the economic depression would have a politicising effect upon the peoples of Africa and the West Indies. But if India represented an example of a mature nationalist rebellion within the British Empire, the opposite extreme in terms of political maturity was the case in Africa. Although there was Communist activity in north and, especially, in South Africa - the CPGB had established links with groups in both areas - Communists had little practical involvement with sub-Saharan Africa during the inter-war years, confining themselves mainly to propaganda and agitation in Britain, because a base for action in any of the African colonies simply did not exist at that time. By the mid-1930s, a small educated class had emerged in the urban centres and the first stirrings of labour unrest was evident, but even at this stage, the discontent did not assume a political character.

The LAI played an important part in reaching out to the international black community, acting as a contact point for African and West Indian nationalists in Britain, offering practical help and campaigning on land rights in Africa and workers and civil rights in the colonies and among the black diaspora. Once again the Communist movement's change of emphasis from international revolution to popular front against fascism affected the

presentation and content of this work. The sacrifice of initiatives such as the ITUCNW, together with the repercussions of the Abyssinian invasion, caused some leading black activists to break with the Communists and turn instead to Pan-Africanism, although this did not signify a rejection of Marxist ideas in the case of the most famous of them - George Padmore. It was a situation which caused problems for the CPGB, already constrained in its efforts to recruit African and West Indian members by the relatively small pool of black political activists in Britain, but the Party continued to pursue its work in this area and was perhaps more effective in doing so, once the sectarianism of the Third Period was abandoned. During the 1930s, the Communist-controlled NWA obtained a degree of co-operation with other black organisations in Britain, such as the WASU, the IASB and even the moderate LCP. Communists worked through the SMM, the Colonial Seamen's Union and the CDA in Britain's ports to represent the rights of those colonial seamen who had settled in Britain and their families. The Party had supporters among the West African student leadership of WASU and, although limited by a lack of established contacts in the African colonies, developed contact with activists in Trinidad and Jamaica, working within the CWIA in Britain on behalf of the West Indian people.

During the inter-war years, the CPGB was the Comintern's main link with the British colonies and semi-colonies. It campaigned and agitated for colonial causes, disseminated anti-colonial propaganda, formed and worked with existing pressure groups and worked to establish a mass movement against imperialism. It provided theoretical guidance and, in the case of India in particular, practical help in organising colonial workers. Following the entry of the Soviet Union into the war on the Allied side in 1941, however, the encouragement of colonial revolution was no longer compatible with Soviet foreign policy aims. Increasingly, though imperceptibly at first, the emphasis was on national Communism, and the dissolution of the Comintern itself, in 1943, soon came to be seen as a step in that direction. Colonial self-determination was presented in terms of a spur to enjoin the fight against fascism, though not, it was stressed, as a condition for the colonial peoples participation in the anti-fascist front.

The war inevitably made contact with activists in the British colonies more difficult for the CPGB, though informal contact was maintained through individual members serving with the British armed forces abroad. The distribution of literature to the colonies was also disrupted, although after June 1941, there was less coverage of colonial issues in the Communist press and that which was printed was less provocative. For example, in January 1942, Desmond Buckle welcomed as 'imaginative' a Government report on labour conditions in West Africa by Major Orde Brown.¹ Later that year he wrote that 'The peoples of Africa, and the West Indies, of Ceylon and other colonies are our allies both in destroying fascism and in building a world free from war.'² This contrasted with Michael Carritt's December 1940 dismissal of a Ministry of Information poster describing the peoples of the Empire as Britain's proud allies as, 'jingo trash'.³ There is evidence however that the CP were aware of the inadequacy of the British Government's response to economic problems in the colonies at this time - when reviewing a report on Welfare and Development by Sir Frank Stockdale⁴ Buckle claimed the scheme had only 'nibbled at the periphery' of the task.⁵

In contrast, Dutt used *Labour Monthly* to put forward a generally sympathetic line towards the aims of Congress, a policy which helped to ameliorate the effect of the CPI's overzealous prosecution of pro-war directives in the face of Congress' intensification of the independence campaign. Whilst the CPGB managed to retain its own theory and policy on the Indian bourgeoisie up to and after Indian independence despite pressure from Moscow, at the same time the Party's attempts to court the Congress left were repeatedly frustrated by elements of the CPI who insisted on following a separate path despite pleas from Dutt; at first adhering strictly to Comintern dictates, and later

¹ Desmond Buckle, 'West African Worker', in *World News and Views*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 17-1-42, p.46.

² Desmond Buckle, 'Colonial Policy', in *World News and Views*, Vol. 22, No. 50, 12-12-42, p.477.

³ Michael Carritt, 'Allies - and Proud of it', in *World News and Views*, Vol. 20, No. 50, 14-12-40, p.718.

⁴ Stockdale was Comptroller for Welfare and Development in the West Indies.

⁵ Desmond Buckle, 'Welfare and Development in the West Indies', in *World News and Views*, Vol. 23, No. 17, 24-4-43, p.132.

following a Maoist line. The evidence would suggest that, in this instance at least, both the national and the colonial parties enjoyed a degree of autonomy in their relationship with the centre.

The election of a Labour Government in 1945 prompted the CPGB to restrict its criticism of foreign and colonial policy until 1947, by which time Cold War developments had ended any illusions of a continuing post-war alliance between the Soviet Union and the Western Allies. Although Communists grew increasingly concerned at the Attlee Government's eagerness to maintain Britain's world role and the nature of Britain's relationship with the US, the CPGB's criticism of colonial policy was particularly muted during this period. It is unlikely that this quiescence occurred through ignorance of the effects of British policies on the colonies⁶ rather that the Party chose not to refer to these through a desire to give the benefit of all doubt to the British Labour Government and in the belief that the spirit of co-operation between the leading powers which was projected at the end of the war would continue. In this sense, the CPGB's policies both pre- and post-1947 were ultimately determined by Soviet foreign policy.

After 1947 the CPGB operated in an oppositional role to the Labour Government on colonial issues, scrutinising colonial policy and publicising what they claimed to be the introduction of bogus constitutions as a means of perpetuating British control and the use of 'colonial emergencies' to counter 'undesirable' nationalist forces - many of which, as in the case of Malaya, were Communist-led. The Party was the only significant organised political grouping in Britain to expose, albeit belatedly, the exploitation inherent in Labour's Welfare and Development policy for Africa, a programme which was welcomed as the African peoples' path to progress by significant sections of the left.

⁶ The E.C.'s Colonial Resolution of December 1946 accused the Labour Government of seeking 'new forms and relationships adaptable to new situations, but retaining the old essence of exploitation'. See 'The Colonial Resolution', in World News and Views, Vol.26, No. 49, 7-12-46.

The Communists' role in highlighting the manipulative nature of Labour's colonial policies enhanced their standing among colonial nationalists, many of whom, encouraged in their struggles by evidence from the Second World War that the imperialist powers were not invincible, were looking with interest to Soviet methods of modernisation through state control. Despite this goodwill, the Party's post-war efforts to recruit Africans and West Indians studying and working in Britain were hampered both by the Cold War ideology, which had an impact on all sections of society and the rise of a more militant form of Pan-Africanism, especially visible from the 1945 Pan-African Conference, whose adherents tended to dismiss Communism as operating on a par with other white imperialisms.

Nevertheless, the Party intensified its colonial work at this point - this was especially true in regard to Britain's African territories which, it claimed, had acquired the status of the 'new Eldorado'⁷ for Western capitalism. Two Conferences of the Colonial Parties of the British Empire were held in 1947 (We Speak For Freedom) and 1954 (Allies For Freedom) - which, in line with the Cold War preoccupations of the Soviet Union, emphasised the importance of peace⁸ for the advancement of colonial liberation movements⁹ - and an International Affairs Committee was set up by the International Department to address matters of policy.¹⁰ CPGB members strove to build the Party among black communities in Britain and received some support, boosted to a degree by

⁷ John Callaghan, 1993, *op.cit.*, p.237.

⁸ Specifically, Britain's withdrawal from NATO and support of nuclear disarmament.

⁹ CP CENT PC 02/21, Proposals to the Political Committee on the Conference of Empire Parties, 16-11-52, (CPGBA).

¹⁰ This Committee consisted of nine sub-committees covering: the West Indies, India, Africa, the Far East, the Middle East, Malaya, South Africa, the Irish Committee and the Jewish Committee. A number of these were involved in wider forms of organisation - the Caribbean Labour Congress, which produced Caribbean News; the Lee Tian Tai Committee, whose journal was the Malayan Monitor; a number of Middle Eastern student organisations, who co-operated in compiling Middle East Today; the Connolly Association, which published the Irish Democrat and the Africa Committee, which published the African Digest and the African Newsletter from 1947-54. (CP CENT PC 02 15, International Department Report to Political Committee, *op.cit.*; See also H. Adi, 'West Africans and the Communist Party in the 1950s', in N. Fishman (ed.), Opening The Books, 1994,) The International Department was directly responsible for contacts with Egyptians, Iraqis and Sudanese and in addition shared joint responsibility for the organisation and education of groups of colonials from Ceylon, India, the West Indies and Nigeria with the London Colonial Advisory Committee. CP CENT PC 02 15, International Department Report to Political Committee, *op.cit.*

their record on opposing racism in Britain. But while the Party's greatest success was in its work with West African students and Nigerians in particular, the low level of political and social development in the region made substantial progress in these colonies extremely difficult.

The CPGB's post-war analysis of the colonial question was set out in its 1951 manifesto, *The British Road to Socialism*, a title which reflected the fact that the Communist movement now believed that there were various roads to Socialism based on different national conditions, including the Parliamentary road. The document's call for a 'close fraternal association' based on equality and mutual interest, between a Socialist Britain free from US control and her former colonies (which were also expected to be under Socialist rule),¹¹ upset some colonial members who regarded it as too close to the Socialist Commonwealth idea, 'upon which the Party had previously heaped scorn'.¹² This was indicative of the problems which the Party faced in shaping a new strategy to meet the changing world conditions in the absence of any guidance from the centre.¹³

During the inter-war years, Communist propaganda had demanded the complete and unconditional independence of all colonial territories and Communist parties concentrated on the tactics of how that independence could be achieved, with little consideration of how the colonies would survive as independent states.¹⁴ Padmore said of the CPGB in the early 1950s that they were still 'spouting the old party clap-trap of the inter-war years, that only "the proletarian vanguard can liberate Africa."¹⁵ But it was during this decade

¹¹ CP CENT INT/24, Document, n d, n t, (CPGBA).

¹² Trevor Carter, op.cit., p.60. Dutt had warned in 1948 against adopting a perspective which promoted the idea of 'a specific future economic-political grouping' which would replace the existing Empire, on the grounds that it could cause colonial nationalists to question the CPGB's commitment to a programme of full liberation. (Rajani Palme Dutt, Notes for 'The Crisis of the British Empire' article, subsequently published in *World News and Views*, 6-11-48, International Department Files, Box 2, (CPGBA). In the event, Dutt suppressed his doubts and supported the manifesto, at least until after the death of Stalin - the document's schematist. See John Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., p.241.

¹³ John Callaghan, 1993, op.cit., p.256.

¹⁴ There were exceptions of course, see Hugo Rathbone, 'The Problem of African Independence', in *Labour Monthly*, Vol. 18, No. 3, March 1936, pp.161-172 and No.4, April 1936, pp.237-269.

¹⁵ G. Padmore, op.cit., p.340.

that Communists began to address the specific problems of each territory. The Soviet Government moved to improve its contacts with African nationalist leaders through international events arranged by sympathetic organisations - the rehabilitation of the idea of the national bourgeoisie's progressive role was significant here - and gained some insight into the faults in their analyses through these contacts.¹⁶

The CPGB itself was examining problems caused by the imposition of artificial boundaries, of nationality and nations, as well as the question of what constitutes a nation and the issue of African consciousness. But, while accepting that there were differences between specific colonies, Communists continued to argue that it was always the ruling-class of the colonial power which derived economic or strategic advantage - despite the uneven development of the liberation movements and the varied character of the demands being made, 'all of them enter into the general stream of the fight against imperialism.'¹⁷

The numerically tiny CPGB, operating for the most part in an unsympathetic domestic climate, faced insurmountable problems in its attempts to carry out the mammoth task of leading the fight against imperialism in the British Empire. The endeavour was burdened from the outset by Lenin's harnessing of two fundamentally antithetical creeds - nationalism and internationalism - in the anti-imperialist struggle and the ever closer identification of the Communist movement with the Soviet state. But despite such shaky foundations, the Party's record on anti-colonialism was one which compared favourably with all other political parties on the left in Britain.

The Party press constantly carried reports on conditions in the Empire-Commonwealth and articles on colonial issues by its own experts, it provided practical help to colonial nationalists, organised public meetings, raised funds to help colonial causes, instituted and participated in numerous demonstrations, vigils and deputations. It supplied books

¹⁶ The Third World increasingly held the best hope for communist advance as, following the debunking of the Stalin myth in February 1956, European communism came under increasing strain.

¹⁷ CP CENT PC 02 14, International Department Report, April 1953, (CPGBA).

and pamphlets to colonial trade union and nationalist organisations, launched campaigns for public action, championed the rights and civil liberties of colonial peoples and provided legal services to trade unionists and nationalist leaders under arrest in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. Party activities spanned Africa, the Middle East, the Far East, and the West Indies.

The CPGB has been accused of a lack of enthusiasm for its anti-imperialist role and of chauvinist tendencies in its treatment of its colonial allies and it is doubtless true that, as in any organisation, evidence - anecdotal or otherwise - exists to support these claims. But it is also the case that the Party initiated frequent discussions on the colonial question, often indulging in sharp self-criticism and making genuine efforts to improve its members' performance in this area. Key individuals devoted the better part of their lives to this work, often at personal risk. The frequency with which colonial issues came before the Central Committee also testifies to the seriousness with which this work was conducted. In addition, the Party campaigned against racial discrimination in Britain and fought for the rights of black workers and their families based in this country; it persistently pricked the conscience of the non-Communist left and helped to raise the awareness of the labour movement on a range of colonial issues. It was a record recognised by national leaders in many countries in Africa, Asia and the West Indies, who, while they did not embrace Communism, acknowledged the part which the CP had played in their political development.

APPENDIX I

The LAI and the Social Democrats

That ILP members maintained their collaboration with the League despite an escalating campaign of vilification during the ultra-left period, is a testament to the importance these individuals attached to colonial nationalist support of the organisation. From the inaugural meeting of the British section, Brockway made a number of representations on behalf of the League to the Socialist International. In a letter to the LSI secretary, Friedrich Adler, in April 1927, he explained the reasons for ILP representation at the Brussels Congress and asked if the Party would be in breach of the LSI's constitution if it affiliated with the League Against Imperialism. The communication made light of the Communists' role in the Congress, stressing the involvement of the colonial nationalist parties.¹

Adler replied that the matter would be referred to the Executive Committee of the LSI for a ruling, but if it was decided that the Second International should collaborate, 'we must in my view make conditions which would give us influence in such a League corresponding to the importance of our International, which, with its seven million members, would be by far the strongest organisation to come into consideration at all'.² It was an answer guaranteed to intensify Communist distrust of the Social Democrats' motives.

Brockway continued to defend the League against allegations of Communist manipulation throughout the summer of 1927. During a meeting convened on 21st July to consider the formation of an Advisory Committee, he reported that the Provisional Committee had investigated these allegations and found them to be baseless. He pointed out that of the LAI's nine-member E.C., only two were CP members and further claimed

¹ ID CI 36/5iv, Letter, Fenner Brockway to Friedrich Adler, 8-4-27, (LPA).

² ID CI 36/5iv, Letter, Friedrich Adler to Fenner Brockway, 13-4-27, (LPA).

that only £30 out of a total of £1,780 contributed to the Brussels Congress had emanated from an organisation with Communist associations, namely the W.I.R.³

Following the International League's E.C. meeting in Cologne during August 1927, at which Brockway replaced Lansbury as International chair, he again wrote to Adler, enclosing a letter from Gibarti declaring that the LAI was 'absolutely independent, financially and morally, from any party or government'.⁴ When the issue was finally debated by the LSI the following month, Brockway attended to plead the case for affiliation. He was pitted against William Gillies, secretary of the British arm of the LSI, who complained that whilst the British Labour Party and TUC had received an invitation to the Brussels Congress, the Second International and International Federation of Trade Unions had not. This had fuelled suspicions that Congress organisers were attempting to split the international socialist movement. Moreover, as the Congress had no basis of representation, the Labour Party's representative would carry no more authority than any individual invited by the organisation to participate.

The LSI's subsequent rejection of the League had an immediate effect upon the British Section. Brockway, forced to choose between his position on the LSI's Executive and his chairmanship of the National and International L.A.I., relinquished the latter posts. There was some compensation in the decision of James Maxton to assume the vacated posts and of Ellen Wilkinson and Father Conrad Noel to join the League's EC, but by the end of 1927, Colonel Malone and Ernest Thurtle had both resigned their membership as it became increasingly difficult for socialists to participate in both organisations simultaneously.

³ According to Haikel, Munzenberg asked the Comintern to contribute at least a third of the estimated 15,000 dollars cost of the Congress, agreeing that the WIR should provide the rest from its own resources. Despite Comintern agreement, the money had still not been transferred three days before the Congress opened. M. Haikel, *op.cit.*, p.26.

⁴ ID CI 36 5vi, Letter, Louis Gibarti to Fenner Brockway, 21-8-27, (LPA).

The end of any significant Social Democratic involvement in the League was signalled at the Frankfurt Congress, where the most vitriolic offensive was directed at James Maxton, the only remaining leading British socialist to occupy a post on the International LAI's ruling body.⁵ At the close of that Congress, Maxton was pressured into replying to the attacks by distancing himself from what he agreed was the imperialist policy of the Labour Government and the reformist tendency within the ILP. But this did not satisfy his critics within the League, who urged him to utilize the pages of *New Leader* to promote their views.

On September 3rd., 1929, the League's London District Committee passed a resolution demanding that 'Comrade Maxton should make his position clear'.⁶ This was followed by a telegram agreed at the E.C. meeting of the British Section held on 10th. September, 1929 - which Maxton did not attend - asking him to publish his Congress speech in *New Leader* immediately. The beleaguered Maxton replied with the single word, 'No!' and subsequently asserted that he had no intention of being 'bullied, harassed and pestered as to his times and methods, by which he should express himself',⁷.

At the ensuing E.C. meeting - which Maxton refused to attend - the following resolution was passed : 'In view of his refusal to carry out the League's work according to the decisions of the E.C. of the British Section, James Maxton should be expelled from membership of the League Against Imperialism'.⁸ Maxton, who was on holiday with his family in Largs when he received the news,⁹ retaliated by printing a report in the September 27th. edition of *New Leader*, which described the expulsion as 'final proof of the impossibility of working with Communists, while they remain in their present state of mind, except upon terms of absolute subservience to their narrow and stupid ukasses'.¹⁰

⁵ B. Gross, op.cit., p.195.

⁶ ID CI 36 33, Report of the Annual Conference of the League Against Imperialism, British Section, February 1931, p.9, (LPA).

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ J. McNair, op.cit., p.184.

¹⁰ International Information, Vol.VI, No.5, 9-10-29, p.23, ID/CI 36/28iii, (LPA).

The expulsion, and the campaign against social democrats which accompanied it, tended only to lend credence to an earlier warning by the LSI that the communists would use individual socialists and 'after they had done what was required of them, they could go, and take with them as thanks a flood of insults'.¹¹

¹¹ International Information, Vol.VI, No.28, 20-7-29, p.301, ID CI/36/18, (LPA).

APPENDIX II

THE OFFICIAL LIST OF OFFICERS ELECTED AND DELEGATES IN ATTENDANCE AT THE BRUSSELS CONGRESS

The General Council - Professor Albert Einstein, Germany; Henri Barbusse, France; Mme. Sun Yat Sen, China; General Lu Dshung Lin, China.

The Executive Committee - George Lansbury M.P., (president); Edo Fimmen, General Secretary of the International Transport Workers' Union, (vice-president); Mohamed Hatta, President of the National Party of Indonesia; Liau Hansin, KMT, Central Executive Committee of China; Dr. Marteaux, member of the Belgian Chamber; Willi Munzenberg, Member of the German Reichstag; Jawaharlal Nehru, Executive member of the INC; Lamine Senghor, president of the Committee for the Defence of the Negro Race; Manuel Ugarte, National Party of Porto Rico.

Ordinary Members - Chen Kuen, Central Council of All-China Unions; Professor Kyomeng You, National University of Peking; Sen Katajama, Japan; F. Martinez, Union cartel Tampico; Julio A. Mella, Peasants' Association of Mexico; Jose Vasconcellor, National Party of Porto Rico; A. Alminiana, Society for the Independence of the Phillipines; Mohamed Hafiz Ramadan Bey, chair of the Egyptian National Party; Messali Hadj, North African Star; Daniel Colraine, South African T.U.C.; A. Semaon, Indonesia; Kin Fan Ling, Korea; Roger Baldwin, Civil Liberties Union, New York; Manuel Gomez, secretary of the Anti-Imperialist League, Chicago; Fenner Brockway, secretary of the Independent Labour Party; S.O. Davies, Miners Federation of Great Britain; Harry Pollitt, English National Minority Movement; Reginald Bridgeman, secretary of the British League Against Colonial Oppression; S. Saklatvala M.P., Great Britain; Henriette Roland-Holst, writer, Holland; Georges Gerard, secretary of the League Against Colonial Oppression, Brussels; Paul Henri Spaak, editor; Charles Plisnier, Belgium; Victorio Verri,

journalist; Giudo Miglioloi M.P., Italy; Henri Barbusse, writer; Madame Duchesne, vice-president of the International Womens' League for Peace and Freedom; Albert Fournier, member of the Chamber; Leon Vernochet, International Association of Education Workers, France; Professor Theodor Lessing, Professor Alfons Goldschmidt; Georg Ledebour, chair of the Socialist Federation; Frau Dr. Helen Stoecker, German Peace Congress; Professor Nejedly, Czechoslovakia; L. Gibarti, general secretary, LACO.

Delegates to Congress

China:

General Lu Dschung Lin, Canton army; Chen Kuen, Central Executive of Chinese Unions; Liau Hansin, KMT Executive Committee; Professor Kyomeng You, National University of Peking; Hsuiung Kwang Suen, KMT Government; Henri Tchai, Chamber of Trade, Canton; General Schao Li Tse, Revolutionary Army; Chao Ting Chi, Sun Yat Sen, Union of America; Siao Tchen Hoin, Chinese Workers' Association, France; Han Tianso Kie, Li Sun Ching, KMT, Holland; Tsan Wei Ming, KMT Billencourt; Vu Pas Y, Chinese Students' Union, Charleroi; Li Kone Tsai, Machine Workers Union, Canton and Canton Union Cartel; Koe Yang Tong, Principal Association of Chinese Students, Germany; Li Ping Hen, Paris; Tang King Pei, KMT, England; Y.S. Hsieh, KMT, Germany; Sia Ting, KMT, Central Europe; Wang Chou, KMT, Central Europe; Li Wen Pey, Defence Committee for the Rights of the Chinese Race; Fan Koen Yuen, Office for the Campaign against Unequal Contracts, Belgium; Wang Kie Kiang, Principal Association of Chinese Students; Van Kien Tchevu, KMT; Koe, KMT, Belgium.

India:

J. Nehru, INC; Professor M. Barakatulla, Indian Freedom Party of America; V. Chattopadhyaya, Association of Indian Journalists; J. Naidu, Association of Indians in Central Europe; Bakar Ali Mirza, Indian Oxford Union; Tarini Sinha, Indian Office of the ILP, London; A.C.N. Nambiar, Association of Indian Journalists.

America:

Roger Baldwin, League for Human Rights and the Urban league; Manuel Gomez, Anti-Imperialist League; Richard Moore, America Negro Workers' Congress and the Union for the Advancement of the Negro; Martins, Patriotic League, Haiti; Angel Sotomayor, Workers' Union of Cuba; M. Morales, Columbia; E. Rabines, Argentina; Victorio Codevilla, Argentina; Charles Quijano, Venezuela; Haya de la Torea, Panama and Peru; F. Martinez, Mexico; Jose Vasconcellos, Porto Pico; A. Alminiana, League for the Independence of the Phillipines.

South and North Africa:

Messali Hadj, North African Star; Chadly Ben Mustapha, Tunis; I.A. La guma, Trade Union Federation, South Africa; J.T. Gumede, South African National Congress; Daniel Colrairie, South Africa T.U.C.; Lamine Senghor, president of the Committee for the Defence of the Negro Race.

Egypt:

Mohamed Ali Hafiz Ramadan Bey, president of the National Party of Egypt; Youssef, National Radical Party.

French Antilles:

Danae Narcisse, Defence Committee of the Negro, (representing French Equatorial Africa); Elie Bloncourt and Max Bloncourt and St. Jacques Camille, Inter-Colonial Union.

Indochina:

Tramanchi, Indochina Union; Hoang Van Giu, Annamite Party for Independence; Van Luc and Duong Van Giao, Constitutional Party and Dui Cong Trung, Young Annamite Party.

Syria:

Mazhar Bakri and Haidar Mardam Bey, Syria-Palestinian Committee.

Palestine:

I. Itzhaki, Workers' Party of Palestine, (Poale Zion).

Persia:

Mortesa and Alavi, Achmed Assadoff, Republican-Revolutionary Party.

Korea: Yiking Li, Korean Students' Union; Whang Wooli, Union of Writers and Journalists of Korea;

Kolu Li, Kin Fa Ling.

Indonesia:

Semaon and Abdul Manaf, Indonesian Freedom Party; Nazir Pamontziak, Gatot and Achmed Subardja, Indonesian Freedom Party; P. Bergsma and Mohammed Hatta, Union of Indonesian National Parties.

France:

Henri Barbusse; Mme, Duchesne; Albert Fournier M.P.; A. Herclet, CGTU; Deloyer, Vernochet and Kyriako, International of Education Workers; Ventadour, secretary of LACO; Dutilleul, Levassort, C. Drevet, "Womens' Voice"; Semard.

Belgium:

Dr. Marteaux M.P.; Georges Gerard, secretary of LACO; Charles Plisnier; Paul-Henri Spaak; Lejour Independent Union of Socialist Students; Liebaers and A. Geerts, Clothing Workers' Union; Gouin Victor; Verspleht, Collot and Jolser, Socialist Union of Former War-Participants; A. De Bevere. International of Conscientions Objectors; Frau Marceline Hecquet, International for Cooperation; Pasteel; Mackeuse; Van Overstraeten; Driesschaert.

Germany:

Professor Alfons Goldschmidt; Professor Theodor Lessing, Dr. Fritz Sternberg; L. Gibarti; Willi Munzenberg; Frau Dr. Goldschmidt; Frau Helene Stocker, George Ledebour; Dr. Kurt Kersten; Gerhart Pohl; Paul Scholze; Lehmann-Lukas; Hans Jager; Otto Lehmann - Russbuldt; Johann Resch, LACO; Dr. Meyer, Socialist Students Federation; Erich Schirner, Union of Bank Employees; Georg Stolt, Imperial Union of German Public Servants; Walter Stocker, Member of the Reichstag; Armin T. Wegener, Conscientious Objectors; Otto Bachmann; Georg Duninghaus; Lucy Peters, LACO; Magda Hoppstock-Huth, International Womens' League for Peace and Freedom; Arthur Holitscher; Fritz Bach; Ernst Toller; Alfons Paquet. Karl August Wittfogel; Fritz Heckert,

Member of The Reichstag; Fritz Schonherr; Putz, Member of the Reichstag; Koenen, Member of the Reichstag; Rev. Fritze, Union of Religious Socialists.

Holland:

Edo Fimmen; Henriette Roland-Holst; I. W. Kruyt; S. J. Rutgers; Han Van Walree; Albert de Joug, Anti-Military Bureau; Muller Lehning; Wijnkoop; Schermerharn; Struyk; Koch, Lackerfeld.

Italy:

Guido Miglioli, Member of the Chamber; Victorio Verri, Dr. D. Martini.

Switzerland:

Dr. Tobler; Willi Trostel.

Czechoslovakia:

Professor Nejedly; Lad. Beran.

Austria:

Dr. Leopold Katz; Frau Dr. Raissa Adler.

England:

The official list of British delegates were:

George Lansbury M.P.; Fenner Brockway; Renginald Bridgeman; Harry Pollitt; S. O. Davies; John Beckett M.P.; Mrs Beckett, Shapurji Saklatvala M.P.; Herbert W. Jones, Society of Friends; Ellen Wilkinson M.P.; Helen Crawford, secretary of the British WIR; Arthur MacManus, Chair of CPGB; Raymond W. Postgate, Plebs League and International War Registers Union; Stokes, All-London Trades Council; James Crossley; William Rust; M. Brown, Secretary of the Amsterdam T.U. International.

(see Rolf Italiaander, Schwarze Haut im Roten Griff, Dusseldorf, 1962, pp.27-31).

In addition to these, representatives from various colonial organisations in Britain were also present, for example, the London Majlis, the Edinburgh Indian Students' Union and Dr. K. S. Bhat of the Workers' Welfare League of India.

(see Reginald Bridgeman, Circular Letter, 4-2-27, RBP, Hull).

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